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Allegiances

If you have not read *Dawnstar's Trouble* please do. *Flowerstar's Judgement* is the prequel and features some spoilers from that book! Please enjoy!

SUNCLAN

LEADER **Foxstar** - Ginger tom with white paws and green eyes

DEPUTY **Mallownose-** Pale gray she-cat with green eyes

MEDICINE CAT **Feathernose**- Soft gray tom with blue eyes
Apprentice, Honeypaw

WARRIORS *(toms and she-cats without kits)*

Hawktalon - Brown tabby tom with amber eyes

Falconclaw- Dark brown tabby tom with amber eyes

Owlfoot- Pale brown tom with darker paws and green eyes

Marshpelt- Mottled, dark brown she-cat with green eyes
Apprentice, Sunpaw

Firetail- Ginger she-cat with green eyes

Leafwhisker- Brown she-cat with green eyes
Apprentice, Sandpaw

Stonewhisker- Gray tom with amber eyes
Apprentice, Applepaw

Moonfur- Cream colored she-cat with blue eyes

Brightclaw- Golden tom with green eyes

Rockfall- Gray tom with amber eyes

Alderfang- Ginger tom with green eyes

Briarheart- Brown tom with green eyes
Apprentice, Cloudpaw

Flintstripe- Dark gray tabby tom with green eyes
Apprentice, Slatepaw

Tallfern- Black, white and gray she-cat with blue eyes

Fernsong- Golden brown she-cat with amber eyes

Frostclaw- White she-cat with pale green eyes

Jayflight- Gray tabby tom with amber eyes

APPRENTICES *(more than six moons old, in training to become warriors)*

Honeypaw- Golden she-cat with green eyes (Daughter of Leafwhisker and Brightlcaw)

Sunpaw- Golden she-cat with green eyes (Daughter of Leafwhisker and Brightlcaw)

Sandpaw- Calico she-cat with pale ginger paws and green eyes (Daughter of Firetail and Owlfoot)

Applepaw- Calico she-cat with green eyes (Daughter of Firetail and Owlfoot)

Cloudpaw- White she-cat with blue eyes (Daughter of Mallownose and Rockfall)

Slatepaw- Black tom with amber eyes (Son of Mallownose and Rockfall)

QUEENS *(she-cats expecting or nursing kits)*

Dovewish- Gray she-cat with blue, former kittypet. Nursing Stonewhisker's kits (Flowerkit, gray she-cat and Stormkit, gray she-cat with silver paws)

Nightwing- Black she-cat with blue eyes. Nursing Hawktalon's kits (Thornkit, pale brown tabby tom, Tigerkit, brown tabby tom, Bramblekit, brown tabby tom, Crowkit, black she-cat and Rainkit, black she-cat with white ears)

ELDERS *(former warriors and queens, now retired)*

Fishtail- Silver tabby she-cat with blue eyes

ASHCLAN

LEADER **Goldenstar** - Golden brown she-cat with green eyes

DEPUTY **Ivyheart-** Gray tabby she=cat with green eyes

MEDICINE CAT **Eagleclaw**- Red-brown tabby tom with amber eyes

Apprentice, Moonpaw

WARRIORS

Robinflight- Ginger tabby she-cat with amber eyes
Apprentice, Hollypaw

Graywillow- Long furred, gray she-cat with green eyes
Apprentice, Mousepaw

Berryleaf- Tortoiseshell she-cat with green eyes
Apprentice, Hazelpaw

Dustclaw- Pale brown tabby tom with amber eyes

Ripplestep- Black tom with yellow eyes
Apprentice, Echopaw

Jayclaw- Dark gray tabby tom with blue eyes
Apprentice, Lionpaw

Cinderflower- Dark gray she-cat with amber eyes
Apprentice, Cloverpaw

Tawnyfrost- Dappled brown she-cat with green eyes
Apprentice, Rainpaw

Owlstorm- Brown tabby tom with amber eyes

Scorchlight- Ginger tom with green eyes

Ravenfur- Black she-cat with yellow eyes

Silverstripe- Silver tabby tom with yellow eyes
Apprentice, Riverpaw

Duskwhisker- Cream-colored she-cat with blue eyes
Apprentice, Mudpaw

Gorsestrike- Dark gray tabby tom with amber eyes
Apprentice, Spiderpaw

Roseclaw- Ginger tabby she-cat with green eyes

Mistypool- Silver and white she-cat with blue eyes

Sharptongue- Red-brown tabby tom with amber eyes

APPRENTICES

Lionpaw- Dark golden tabby tom with green eyes (Son of Goldenstar and Scorchlight)

Hazelpaw- Ginger she-cat with amber eyes (Daughter of Goldenstar and Scorchlight)

Mudpaw- Dark brown tabby tom with amber eyes (Son of Tawnyfrost and Owlstorm)

Cloverpaw- Brown tabby she-cat with a white chest and green eyes (Daughter of Tawnyfrost and Owlstorm)

Rainpaw- Gray tabby she-cat with white paws and blue eyes (Daughter of Graywillow and Silverstripe)

Hollypaw- Black and white she-cat with green eyes (Daughter of Berryleaf and Ripplestep)

Mousepaw- Brown tom with green eyes (Son of Berryleaf and Ripplestep)

Spiderpaw- Black and brown she-cat with yellow eyes (Daughter of Berryleaf and Ripplestep)

Riverpaw- Blue-gray she-cat with blue eyes (Daughter of Mistypool and Jayclaw)

Echopaw- Gray tabby she-cat with a white chest and paws, green eyes (Daughter of Mistypool and Jayclaw)

Moonpaw- Silver she-cat with black tabby stripes and blue eyes (Daughter of Mistypool and Jayclaw)

QUEENS

Heatherstorm- Light gray she-cat with blue eyes, nursing Gorsestrike's kits (Lilykit, gray tabby she-cat and Graykit, gray tom)

ELDERS

Cinderclaw- Gray tabby she-cat with amber eyes

Sandnose- Pale ginger she-cat with green eyes

MOONCLAN

LEADER **Owlstar-** Fluffy white tom with blue eyes

DEPUTY **Cloudwind-** Gray and white she-cat with blue eyes

MEDICINE CAT **Skyclaw**- Gray tom with yellow eyes

WARRIORS

Ashbird- Gray she-cat with black specks and blue eyes

Whiteriver- White she-cat with blue eyes

Blacksky- Black tom with white paws, belly and yellow eyes
Apprentice, Cinderpaw

Ivystone- Gray tabby she-cat with green eyes

Stonefoot- Large, gray tom with amber eyes

Thorntalon- Brown tabby tom with amber eyes
Apprentice, Breezepaw

Snakepelt- Gray tom with yellow eyes
Apprentice, Shadowpaw

Smokeleaf- Gray tabby she-cat with blue eyes
Apprentice, Icepaw

Sootmask- Black tom with white markings and amber eyes
Apprentice, Frostpaw

Windsong- Light gray she-cat with blue eyes
Apprentice, Cedarpaw

Silverpool- Silver tabby she-cat with green eyes
Apprentice, Crowpaw

Driftwater- Brown tom with amber eyes

Squirrelpelt- Ginger she-cat with green eyes

Spidertail- Black tom with amber eyes
Apprentice, Amberpaw

Riverlight- Black she-cat with blue eyes

Blossomfrost- Light gray she-cat with blue eyes

APPRENTICES

Amberpaw- Golden brown and white she-cat with green eyes (Daughter of Squirrelpelt and Thorntalon)

Cedarpaw- Brown tom with amber eyes (Son of Squirrelpelt and Thorntalon)

Shadowpaw- Black tom with amber eyes (Son of Ashbird and Spidertail)

Breezepaw- Black tom with blue eyes (Son of Ashbird and Spidertail)

Cinderpaw- Gray she-cat with amber eyes (Daughter of Ashbird and Spidertail)

Crowpaw- Black tom with white markings and blue eyes (Son of Riverlight and Blacksky)

Frostpaw- White, spotted she-cat with green eyes (Daughter of Blossomfrost and Owlstar)

Icepaw- Pure white she-cat with blue eyes (Daughter of Blossomfrost and Owlstar)

QUEENS

Featherdawn- White she-cat with gray markings and blue eyes, nursing Sootmask's kits (Badgerkit, black and white tom, Nightkit, black she-cat and Dovekit, light gray she-cat)

ELDERS

Runningpath- Lean, brown tom with amber eyes

Berryfrost- White she-cat with blue eyes

Haretooth- Brown tom with amber eyes

Ravenfall - Black she-cat with green eyes

LICHENCLAN

LEADER **Birdstar-** Elderly brown tabby she-cat with amber eyes

DEPUTY **Jumpheart-** Golden brown tabby tom with amber eyes

MEDICINE CAT **Sagefeather-** Fluffy gray she-cat with green eyes

Apprentice, Stormpaw

WARRIORS

Featherheart- Soft gray and white she-cat with blue eyes
Apprentice, Sparrowpaw

Patchfoot- White and brown tom with amber eyes
Apprentice, Badgerpaw

Hareclaw- Brown tom with green eyes
Apprentice, Jaggedpaw

Sunstorm- Golden tom with amber eyes
Apprentice, Daisypaw

Rowanfang- Dark brown tom with amber eyes
Apprentice, Fieldpaw

Krestleflame- Golden brown tabby she-cat with amber eyes

Cedarcloud- Brown tabby she-cat with green eyes
Apprentice, Maplepaw

Poppywing- Black and brown she-cat with green eyes
Apprentice, Hazelpaw

Ashstream- Dark gray she-cat with blue eyes
Apprentice, Gingerpaw

Amberflame- Ginger she-cat with amber eyes
Apprentice, Vinepaw

Breezefall- Pale brown tom with amber eyes

Barksong- Brown she-cat with amber eyes

Mothflame- Dappled gray she-cat with blue eyes

Skytail- Gray tabby tom with green eyes
Apprentice, Elmpaw

Fawnsky- Brown she-cat with green eyes

Mosswing- Brown she-cat with green eyes

APPRENTICES

Stormpaw- Gray she-cat with blue eyes (Daughter of Featherheart and Skytail)

Badgerpaw- Black and white tom with amber eyes (Son of Featherheart and Skytail)

Daisypaw- Pale gray she-cat with blue eyes (Daughter of Mothflame and Jumpheart)

Sparrowpaw- Brown tabby tom with amber eyes (Son of Mothflame and Jumpheart)

Vinepaw- Brown she-cat with green eyes (Daughter of Cedarcloud and Patchfoot)

Hazelpaw- Brown she-cat with amber eyes (Daughter of Cedarcloud and Patchfoot)

Fieldpaw- Light golden brown tom with green eyes (Son of Krestleflame and Hareclaw)

Gingerpaw- Ginger she-cat with green eyes (Daughter of Krestleflame and Hareclaw)

Jaggedpaw- Red-brown tom with amber eyes (Son of Fawnsky and Sunstorm)

Maplepaw- Golden brown and white she-cat with green eyes (Daughter of Fawnsky and Sunstorm)

Elmpaw- Brown tom with amber eyes (Son of Mosswing and Rowanfang)

ELDERS

Dustfang - Pale brown tom with green eyes

Rockflower - Gray she-cat with blue eyes

Prologue

Flowerstar's dream was pleasant. She was in a peaceful field full of flowers, the moon was high in the sky and showing off a beautiful night. She felt calm and serene, something she hadn't felt in a long time. She closed her eyes, breathing in the scenery. She knew it was just a dream, but she wanted to enjoy it while she was here. Two other scents slowly crept in on her, she opened her eyes and found herself facing Poppyfur and Honeywing. She let out a purr, glad to see her two friends.

"Hello." She dipped her head kindly to the two medicine cats. Honeywing's gaze was soft, and Poppyfur's nervous but both were laced with sadness. Unease quickly took over Flowerstar's feelings of calm, she looked around before turning back to the StarClan cats. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing, Flowerstar." Honeywing mewed, her voice soothing Flowerstar. However, Poppyfur shot her a threatening glare and sighed. "We just decided to visit you." She looked around. "It's a lovely night." Flowerstar didn't respond, she just looked at Poppyfur who still looked troubled. *What's wrong with her?* Flowerstar hadn't seen Poppyfur since she died, wasn't she happy to see her.

"Something feels off." Flowerstar mewed, smelling a strange scent in the distance. "What's going on?"

"Just relax, Flowerstar." Poppyfur finally spoke. "And look at the sky." The sky? Flowerstar looked up, the night was starting to fade and dawn was starting to come. It was the most beautiful sky she had seen in awhile. The oranges, yellows and reds of the sky mixing with the fading blue of the night sky reminded Flowerstar of a fire. At the thought of fire, the strange scent grew stronger. It was the smell of something burning. *Fire!* She looked around in a panic for the flames, but saw nothing but the flowers in the field.

"Calm down, Flowerstar." Honeywing mewed, stepping closer. "There's no need to panic." Flowerstar looked at Honeywing, panic

rising in her chest. It was then that she noticed the dawn sky was casting shadows over the flowers in the field, almost to where Flowerstar couldn't see them any more.

Suddenly, she understood. "The dawn is overtaking the flowers." She said quietly. She looked at Poppyfur and Honeywing who nodded solemnly.

"It's time Flowerstar," Poppyfur said. "You know you'll she be great."

"*Flowerstar!"* Flowerstar opened her eyes to find herself in a smoke clogged den, she could hear a voice calling for her. *Dawnfire.* She stood up, breathing in heavy smoke and coughing violently. How much smoke had she already breathed in? She tried to step out, but her shaky legs gave out from under her. *I'm not going to make it. Please don't let Dawnfire come in here.* She prayed silently and curled up into a ball, waiting for the smoke to take her completely.

"Flowerstar!" Flowerstar's prayer had not come true, Dawnfire was standing in the SunTree's entrance, her green eyes wide with fear and horror.

"Dawnfire..." Her voice choked, she wanted to tell the SunClan deputy to get out and save herself, but her dry throat wouldn't allow her. Dawnfire rushed into the den, helping Flowerstar to her paws. The leader fell against Dawnfire, she could barely stand. She wanted to tell Dawnfire to leave her, but she knew that it wouldn't happen. *You poor she-cat.* Flowerstar thought as Dawnfire helped her out. *You've lost so much, I'm sorry I have to be another.* As they stepped outside, Flowerstar looked up, struggling to see through her watering eyes and the heavy smoke that filled the air.

"Hurry up!" A few tail lengths away was Dawnfire's brother, Turtleblaze. Flowerstar could tell Dawnfire was struggled to help her, but she was trying. There was a crack of wood as a tree fell in front of them, sending up a flurry of sparks and ash. Dawnfire turned her head, coughing heavily. *You can't die! That's not what's supposed to happen.* Flowerstar dropped herself to the ground, letting out more coughs. Her lungs burned, she couldn't continue any longer and she couldn't let Dawnfire try and help her anymore.

"Flowerstar!" Dawnfire cried, trying to nudge Flowerstar to her paws, but the leader refused. "Come on! We have to leave!" Panic lined Dawnfire's mew, panic and sadness.

"Dawnfire, you need to go." Flowerstar finally forced out the words, her voice dry and cracking. She half-opened her eyes, looking into Dawnfire's bright green eyes. Those green eyes filled Flowerstar with so much hope for SunClan's future.

"No!" Dawnfire wailed. "Not without you!" Dawnfire began lifting Flowerstar onto her back, but Flowerstar pushed her away. She couldn't let the warrior do this to herself.

"Dawnfire." Flowerstar lifted her head, keeping her gaze and voice steady. "My time is over." She could see the deputy's eyes filled with pain.

"No! It's not!" Dawnfire cried, throwing herself to the ground. Flowerstar's heart ached for her, she was so scared. She wished she could do more. "You're SunClan's leader! We can't do this without you! I'm not ready to become leader!" She cried into the smoke filled sky, her body trembling with fear and sadness.

Flowerstar moved, it was difficult but she shifted her body to touch her nose to Dawnfire's forehead. "Yes you are, Dawnfire. You will be the savior of the forest, I know you will." Her breathing was faltering, her throat burned. "When the forest is in danger, a new dawn will blaze brighter than the sun." Flowerstar recited the prophecy that had haunted her for so long. "You've been hiding from your destiny, Dawnfire, but now it's time to realize it. You will blaze brighter than the sun, Dawnfire. Brighter than I ever could." As Flowerstar looked at Dawnfire, she realized how much she had grown to love this warrior. Flowerstar never had kits of her own, but she loved Dawnfire as if she was her own daughter. "I was never good at judging cats, I thought that Thornstar would never turned into Falconclaw, and I was worried that you would never face your destiny; but I know now that you are ready. You are ready to lead SunClan, Dawnfire; and you are ready to save the forest." Flowerstar laid her head down, images flashing in her head. Falconclaw, Thornstar, her parents, so many cats that she had known and judged poorly.

"Flowerstar..." Dawnfire's voice was a whimper, she looked defeated. Then Flowerstar felt something cold hit her fur, her eyes slowly drifted up towards the sky where she was water. *The rain will put out the fire.* She thought. *But it won't save me.* Dawnfire laid down beside Flowerstar, pressing into her fur. In this moment, Flowerstar was grateful that her deputy was with her now, she was glad that she wasn't dying alone. She pressed back against Dawnfire, waiting.

"Flowerstar, how am I supposed to lead SunClan?" Dawnfire questioned, her voice quiet and trembling.

Flowerstar closed her eyes, feeling her final breaths approaching. "You won't be doing it alone, Dawnfire...we will all be there for you." She knew that she would see Dawnfire again soon, when she came to get her nine lives.

The two of them stopped speaking, and the rain fell harder. Soaking both she-cats, but Dawnfire stayed. Flowerstar opened her eyes slightly, seeing the glowing outlines of the cats she had lost in her life. Stonewhisker and Dovewish, her parents standing side by side and waiting for her. Love filled Flowerstar's heart and she closed her eyes once more, taking her final breath.

Chapter 1

There was a gentle breeze, rustling the leaves of the trees outside the nursery. Flowerkit shifted in her nest, feeling her sister's pelt close against hers. Her ears twitched as she heard a small chorus of tiny snores from the cats around her. Flowerkit opened her eyes, blinking away sleep and her dreams of the forest. She lifted her head, letting out a large yawn and turning to look at her sister, Stormkit who still slept soundly. Behind her was the sleeping figure of her mother, Dovewish as well. She was starting to wonder if she was the only cat awake in the nursery until she glanced over to the other side.

The other queen in the nursery had a large nest full of kits, and two of them wrestled on the nursery floor while their littermates slept. There was tom with spiky fur wrestling with a black she-cat. Flowerkit watched them, the tom was Thornkit and the black she-cat was his sister Rainkit. Their littermates, Tigerkit, Bramblekit and Crowkit were all sleeping soundly in their nest but Thornkit and Rainkit wrestled quietly.

Flowerkit didn't say anything, she just watched the two kits play. Thornkit was larger than Rainkit, but the black she-cat was quick. Flowerkit looked over at her own sister, twitching in her sleep. Stormkit's fur was soft and gray, but her paws were silver. Flowerkit attempted to sit up without waking either Stormkit or Dovewish, but found that her tail was pinned by Stormkit's body. She let out a snort, her sister was so lazy.

Thornkit's ears twitched when Flowerkit let out her snort and he turned his head with curious amber eyes. "You're awake." He mewed excitedly, Rainkit rose to her paws and looked with Flowerkit with eager blue eyes.

"Come play with us, Flowerkit." Rainkit dropped into a playful stance, sticking her hindquarters high in the air.

"I would but," She glanced over her shoulder at where Stormkit had

her tail pinned. "Stormkit is sleeping on my tail."

Thornkit laughed and padded over to their nest, looking at the sleeping form of Stormkit. "Doesn't this happen a lot?" Flowerkit thought for a moment, Stormkit was very restless in her sleep and sometimes would roll over onto Flowerkit's tail or paw but would roll off soon. "Just pull your tail out from under her."

"It will hurt if I do that." Flowerkit complained, trying to tug her tail out from under Stormkit's weight. Thornkit scoffed and placed his paws in the nest, and starting gently pushing Stormkit away. "Don't wake her." She hissed.

"I won't." Thornkit replied, and kept pushing Stormkit away. Stormkit let out a groan and rolled over on her own, freeing Flowerkit's tail. "She's too lazy, she won't wake up until you're loud." Thornkit dropped back down to the floor and looked up at Flowerkit. "Now come play with us."

Flowerkit licked her tail and nodded, leaving her nest and shaking away a stray piece of moss that clung to her pale pelt. She faced Thornkit and followed him over to his own nest where his littermates and mother, Nightwing slept. Flowerkit cast a glance outside towards SunClan camp, it was barely past dawn, it might be a while before the others woke up.

"It's unfair now." Rainkit pointed out. "There's three of us."

Thornkit stuck his head in the air and puffed his chest out. "Please, I could take both of you at the same time." Flowerkit shared a glance with Rainkit, she rolled her blue eyes at her brother's arrogance.

"Is that so?" Rainkit teased and motioned with her head towards Flowerkit. Flowerkit nodded, understanding what Rainkit meant. "I guess you'll have to prove it." Rainkit twitched her tail, which Flowerkit assumed was the signal to attack. The two she-cats jumped forward, knocking Thornkit to the ground in a flurry of dust. He let out a cry of alarm and kicked his paws, Flowerkit felt his paw hit her shoulder but it didn't hurt.

Thornkit struggled underneath Rainkit and Flowerkit, letting out

squeals and grunts as he tried to get out from under then. "I don't see you taking on both of us." Flowerkit taunted, her voice breaking into laughter at the same time.

"It's not fair!" Thornkit complained, still underneath the both of them. "You didn't give me a chance to dodge."

"I'm pretty sure enemy warriors don't give you a chance to dodge in a real battle." Rainkit teased, her eyes sparkling. The black she-cat let up on her brother, twitching her white ear tips.

Flowerkit let up as well and Thornkit sat up, attempting to smooth down his pale brown fur and shooting annoyed glances at the two she-cats. While he sulked away from then, Flowerkit glanced over towards Stormkit and Dovewish to make sure that their fight hadn't woken up. Both cats were sleeping soundly, tails twitching in their sleep.

Suddenly, Flowerkit was launched forward, tumbling head over tail across the nursery floor. The world around her tumbled and she felt herself hit something soft that jumped in alarm with a cry.

"What the--" A sleep riddled voice cried out while Flowerkit tried to regain her balance. She quickly recognized the voice as Stormkit's. Flowerkit rolled over on her belly, looking up to see Stormkit standing above her with her gray fur standing on edge. Behind them Dovewish stirred as well. "What are you doing?" Stormkit demanded, lashing her tiny tail

Flowerkit looked over her shoulder, she had a sneaking suspicion she knew who attacked her. She looked over her shoulder at Thornkit who had taken a step back and had his ears flattened with shame. "He pushed me." Flowerkit hissed at the tom. Turning back to her sister she dipped her head. "I'm sorry." Stormkit shrugged and cast her blue eyes past Flowerkit towards Thornkit.

"It's fine." Stormkit stood up and got out of the nest, staring down Thornkit who starting to look uncomfortable. "It was his fault." Flowerkit watched as Stormkit dashed forward towards Thornkit. The small brown tom didn't have much time to react as Stormkit tackled him to the ground. "Don't you have any respect for sleeping

she-cats?" Stormkit placed a silver paw on his head while Thornkit struggled underneath.

Flowerkit couldn't help but laugh at her sister and Thornkit. Stormkit was feisty and didn't tolerate being teased or messed with. She was a force to be reckoned with.

"I'm sorry!" Thornkit wailed, squirming below her paw.

"I hope so." Stormkit sneered and let Thornkit up. The spiky brown tom scrambled to his paws and shook his fur free of dust. He glanced over at Stormkit with annoyance in his amber eyes.

"You guys are loud." There was large yawn following whoever spoke. Flowerkit, Stormkit, Thornkit and Rainkit all looked towards Nightwing's nest. Tigerkit was now sitting up, and looking incredibly tired. Beside him, Crowkit and Bramblekit were also starting to stir.

"Tell your brother not to be rude." Stormkit stuck her nose in the air and sat beside Flowerkit with a huff.

Tigerkit looked at Thornkit. "Why is it always you waking us up?" He grumbled before stretching out and climbing out of the nest.

"It was Flowerkit who bumped into her!" Thornkit pointed at Flowerkit with his paw.

Flowerkit hissed at him, annoyance flaring inside of her. "Because *you* pushed me!" She looked at Stormkit, lashing her tail. "Arrogant furball."

Stormkit and Rainkit giggled, Thornkit looked almost hurt. He stared at his paws, twitching his tail in annoyance. Flowerkit wasn't really that mad at Thornkit, she still considered him a friend. Flowerkit stood up and padded over to Thornkit and nudged him. "Hey, it's okay you mousebrain." She teased. "None of us are mad, and Tigerkit is just grumpy 'cause you woke him up."

Thornkit looked up at her, looking grateful. He then looked at Bramblekit and Crowkit who were now sitting up and yawning. "I wish we could play outside." He twitched his ears. "But we're not

two moons old yet."

"You two can play outside." Rainkit pointed out to Flowerkit and Stormkit. "So why don't you?"

Flowerkit hadn't really thought about it, both she and Stormkit were two moons old but they hadn't really gone outside to play. "Because, while playing with Flowerkit is fun and all, it wouldn't be as fun without you five." Stormkit explained. "You lot will be two moons old soon and then we can play outside all we want!"

Flowerkit nodded eagerly, Stormkit was right. She wanted to play outside with Thornkit and his siblings, there were so many of them they could play all the games they wanted! She thought of when they would be two moons old, all the games they could play. She looked at her friends, waiting impatiently for the moons to pass.

Chapter 2

"Are you ready?" Flowerkit eagerly twitched her tail, jumping around Thornkit and his four siblings. The five of them looked as excited as Flowerkit felt. Thornkit, Rainkit, Crowkit, Tigerkit and Bramblekit had all been allowed to go outside of the nursery for the first time. Flowerkit and Stormkit would be joining them, and Flowerkit couldn't be more excited. She wanted nothing more than to play with her friends without being stuck in the confines of the nursery.

"We're ready." Tigerkit nodded. "Let's go!" The large group of kits bounded out of the nursery and into SunClan camp. It was sunhigh and the Clan was lively. In the center of the camp where the SunTree was there was a group of cats having a conversation. One of them was SunClan's leader, Foxstar. Beside him was his deputy, Mallownose and a selection of other warriors including Owlfoot, Rockfall and Flowerkit's father, Stonewhisker.

"What are we going to do now that we're out here?" Crowkit questioned, looking towards her denmates.

"Play a game obviously." Tigerkit twitched his striped tail. Flowerkit wondered if he would ever get the black stripes on the rest of his body, or if they would just stay forever on his tail.

"What kind of game?" Rainkit questioned, tilting her head. Tigerkit thought for a moment and looking around the camp.

"I got it." Tigerkit bounded towards the warrior's den while the other kits followed. The brown kit slipped behind the warrior den, confusing Flowerkit as to where he was headed. The warrior's den was a large bush, lined with thick and twisting brambles to make it stronger. Behind the warrior's den was a space of area between the den and the wall of the hollow. The land went up in a slight incline forming a hill.

Tigerkit climbed up the hill, his fellow kits following him. At the top of the small hill was the beginnings of some kind of bush, the

hill also stopped abruptly and had a bit of a drop off. Flowerkit looked at Tigerkit, wondering what he had planned exactly.

"We'll play here. One team will have a moss ball and they'll try to get it here and drop it off the edge. The other team will try and get it behind the nursery, each team will have someone defending each point." Tigerkit explained while the kits listened intently. "First team to make their goal wins."

Flowerkit nodded along, it sounded like a fun game. Tigerkit was very good at taking charge.

"But," Rainkit stepped forward. "There's not an even number of us. One team will have one more cat unless one of us sits out."

Tigerkit thought for a moment. "Okay, the first team will be myself, Stormkit and Bramblekit. We're all pretty big, but your team will be bigger and faster. And each of us has one of the older kits."

"So the other team would be me, Flowerkit, Crowkit and Rainkit." Thornkit mewed, looking at the she-cats that would be on his team.

"Does that sound fair?" Tigerkit questioned his brother, looking at him for a moment then turning to the rest of the group for their opinions as well.

"Sounds fair to me." Rainkit nodded. The other kits agreed, Flowerkit still felt that her team had a slight advantage because they had one more but both Tigerkit and Stormkit were the biggest kits in the nursery, Tigerkit was even bigger than Flowerkit.

"We can both plan, then." Tigerkit lifted his head. "We'll meet in the center of camp in just a few moments." Tigerkit gathered up Stormkit and Bramblekit and led them away, Flowerkit assumed that the hill would be their goal that they had to protect.

"Well," Thornkit began speaking once the other three were out of earshot. "Who is going to be defending."

"I think it should be Flowerkit." Crowkit pointed with her paw towards Flowerkit. "She's the biggest and we'll want the three of us wanting to steal the moss ball and Rainkit is really fast."

Flowerkit sat awkwardly, they wanted *her* to defend? She was the biggest but Flowerkit was also clumsy, she wasn't sure if she could do, but if her teammates thought she was the right choice she wouldn't argue. "Alright." She nodded her head. "I'll defend."

"I bet Tigerkit will be defending for the same reason." Thornkit added. "We're going to have to watch out for Stormkit though, she's fast and she's big. Bramblekit will be defending her while she tries to get the moss ball."

"If I could trip him up," Crowkit added. "Then Thornkit could get to Stormkit and Rainkit could take the moss ball and run."

Flowerkit watched with interest as her friends planned out in such an intricate way, she didn't think that she could figure things like that out herself. *They will all be great warriors.* Flowerkit thought with pride.

"Are we ready?" Rainkit stood up. "We'll meet up with them, Flowerkit can stay here and wait for them to bring the ball here. "Will you be ready?"

Flowerkit nodded. "Absolutely." She hid her nerves by keeping her voice steady. "I'm hoping that you will all do so good that I won't have to defend." She chuckled.

Thornkit puffed out his chest. "That's the plan." He lashed his tail with confidence and then led the three kits away to meet up with Tigerkit. Flowerkit climbed up to the top of the hill, looking off the edge. She wondered if it would be dangerous to fall off of it. *I doubt it. It's not that big of a ledge.* She shrugged and looked past the warrior's den, trying to catch a glimpse of her denmates, but she couldn't spot them past the den. She let out a sigh and sat down to wait, hoping that it wouldn't take too long. She wanted to play.

After several long moments of waiting, and Flowerkit playing with a leaf she tore of the small bush, she heard the squeals of kits growing closer. Flowerkit dropped her leaf and jumped to her paws. The kits were playing and she could hear them shouting. The shadows of the kits were casting against the wall as they wrestled for the ball.

After a moment, Stormkit burst around the corner with the moss ball secured in her teeth and Thornkit, Crowkit and Rainkit were hot on her heels. Behind them Bramblekit followed, trying to trip up Thornkit. *So Tigerkit is the one defending, Thornkit was right.*

Bramblekit tackled Thornkit and the two brothers tumbled off to the side while Rainkit and Crowkit tried to stop Stormkit. Stormkit however, was faster and had longer legs. She ran in leaps and bounds, avoiding their attacks. Flowerkit braved herself to stop her sister from scoring but Rainkit managed to pull ahead of Stormkit and made her come to a harsh stop.

Stormkit's jaw clenched down on the moss ball and she swiped at Rainkit. While Rainkit distracted her, Crowkit jumped on Stormkit's back and threw her off balance. The gray she-cat fell to her side and dropped the moss ball, it went rolling away towards where Thornkit and Bramblekit were wrestling.

Rainkit scrambled away to go grab it, but Bramblekit had noticed and he lashed out with his paw, batting it away. The ball flew over Rainkit's head and back towards Crowkit, Stormkit and Flowerkit. It hit the ground and rolled away. Stormkit shoved Crowkit away and scrambled for the ball of moss, Crowkit struggled to get up.

Without thinking, Flowerkit dashed forward. She was faster than Stormkit and reached the moss ball before Stormkit did. "Thornkit!" Flowerkit to the pale brown kit's attention and hit the moss ball as hard as she could, sending over Stormkit's head and to where Thornkit and Bramblekit were fighting.

Thornkit poked his head up, pushing away from Bramblekit and towards the moss ball. With a hiss, Stormkit turned on her paws and ran towards the moss ball. Thornkit reached it first, as he was much closer. Thornkit took the ball in his teeth and turned to run, only to be cut off by Bramblekit who knocked him to the ground, sending the moss ball skipping across the ground.

Rainkit and Crowkit were both back on their paws and running to get the moss ball before Stormkit did. With a huge heave, she jumped over Rainkit and Crowkit and picked up the moss ball, looking at Flowerkit with challenge in her blue eyes. Flowerkit

prepared herself to defend against Stormkit and her sister charged towards her.

Stormkit neared and Flowerkit let out a hiss, batting at Stormkit. Her sister avoided her attacks but struggled to get past her. Flowerkit landed a hit on Stormkit's shoulder and she stumbled backwards.

Stormkit's eyes looked past Flowerkit and once over her shoulder as Rainkit and Crowkit grew closer. Suddenly, Stormkit reared up on her hind legs. *She's going to throw it over my head!* Thinking on her feet, Flowerkit copied her sister, trying to stand up on her back paws. *Not on my watch!*

Stormkit's balance wasn't great, she craned her neck and threw the ball of moss above Flowerkit's head. Flowerkit reached up with her forepaw and claws extended. Her claw caught the moss and she stopped it. *Yes!* Joy and pride filled Flowerkit's body, she had stopped it.

Flowerkit's balance faltered, she couldn't stand up like this anymore. Flowerkit adjusted her hind leg, but her body gave out and she started to fall back onto all fours. While she fell, however, her right hind leg twisted. Pain shot up through her entire leg and Flowerkit let out a sharp cry of pain. Her leg shot out from under her and Flowerkit fell from her standing position.

Flowerkit's side landed on the edge of the hill, hurting her rib cage and her head bashing against the floor of the hill. Her body fell off the edge of hill, dropping like a rock to the ground and hitting with a painful thud.

Her entire body ached from the fall, but it was her leg that hurt the most. Pain throbbed throughout her leg, nearly blinding her with how intense it was. She cried out in pain, calling for help but blood roared in her ears and she could barely hear.

"Flowerkit!" She could hear Stormkit's muffled mew around her, and she could hear footsteps scuffling around her. Flowerkit opened her eyes and looked up, trying to focus on the faces around her. Stormkit looked down at her with fear in her blue eyes, Rainkit,

Crowkit, Bramblekit and Thornkit also gathered around looking horrified. "Someone go get Feathernose!" Stormkit shouted, her voice cracking. Rainkit turned and ran off out of Flowerkit's view.

"Are you okay? What happened? What hurts?" Stormkit berated her with questions, that Flowerkit really didn't have an answer to, just that she wasn't okay and the pain was too much. "My leg..." She whimpered, even speaking hurt.

"Move it, kits!" A commanding voice cut the air, Flowerkit winced and watched as the kits around her scrambled away. A face looked over her, it was a silver tabby tom with intense, focused blue eyes. *Feathernose. SunClan's medicine cat.* Flowerkit identified the tom, really hoping that he would help the pain go away. Flowerkit felt herself being lifted off the ground as Feathernose took her scruff in his teeth.

"Stormkit, go get Dovewish and the rest of you return to the nursery." He said through Flowerkit's fur and began carrying her away. Every shift sent pain blasting through her leg, she didn't have the energy to even cry out anymore; she just let out pitiful whimpers. Flowerkit was carried through SunClan camp and to the medicine cat den.

Flowerkit was surrounded by the scent of herbs as Feathernose stepped into his den. "Honeypaw," He spoke. "Did you get everything ready?"

"Yes I did." A soft voice responded. "Her nest is right here." Flowerkit was set down in a soft nest and she looked up.

"What happened?" Flowerkit heard the panicked voice of Dovewish as her mother stormed into the medicine cat den. "Is she okay?" She demanded.

"She is fine, Dovewish." Feathernose, his voice spoke. "It's just a sprain, it will hurt and she'll need some time to rest but other than that she'll be totally okay."

Dovewish let out a sigh. "So she's going to be just fine?"

"Absolutely." Flowerkit felt Feathernose sniff her injured leg. "The only issue that might happen is some future pain, but it won't stop her from being a warrior. I'll give her some poppy seeds and let her sleep the pain off, you can come see her when she wakes up."

"Thank you, Feathernose." Dovewish sounded grateful. "Come on, Stormkit, we'll come see Flowerkit later. Flowerkit heard her mother and sister leave, but the pain remained in her leg.

"It hurts." Flowerkit whimpered.

"I know." Feathernose's voice softened, he set something in front of Flowerkit's nose. She opened her eyes and saw a tiny black seed in front of her. "Eat this, it will soothe the pain and help you sleep." Flowerkit didn't complain, she just wanted the pain to stop. She licked up the seed and closed her eyes, waiting for sleep to take her.

Chapter 3

"You need to work on your catching." Stormkit teased, twitching her ears playfully. Flowerkit snorted and reached over, pulling the moss ball back over to her nest using her claw.

"You try catching when you can't stand up." Flowerkit retorted and batted the ball back over to her sister who caught it with ease and stuck out her tongue. Flowerkit rolled her eyes, but couldn't help but laugh.

Flowerkit had been in the medicine cat den with her injured ankle for four moons, a lot longer than Feathernose first intended. He had originally thought that her injury was just a sprain, but learned that it was actually broken. This discovery was made at Flowerkit's own expense when she tried to stand up and pain shot through her leg.

However, not even broken bones took this long to heal and Flowerkit was starting to become concerned. It just a few days, she would be six moons old but her leg still wasn't fully healed. It hurt to walk and if she couldn't walk how could she be an apprentice? Flowerkit held her fears from Stormkit, but part of was really scared that her leg would never properly heal.

Flowerkit heard pawsteps and looked up to see Honeypaw, Feathernose's apprentice. During Flowerkit's time in the medicine cat den she had become pretty good friends with Honeypaw. Honeypaw was made an apprentice when Flowerkit was barely a moon old, but the she-cat had always been nice.

"Hello, Stormkit." Honeypaw nodded at Flowerkit's sister, Stormkit looked up at Honeypaw with interest in her eyes.

"Hi, Honeypaw. Do you know when Flowerkit will be let out of here? We're supposed to become apprentices soon." Stormkit questioned. Honeypaw visibly tensed and began avoiding Stormkit's gaze, shuffling through some herbs.

"Well, Stormkit." Honeypaw's voice shook slightly. "That's for Feathernose to say, not me. I'm just an apprentice so I really can't tell you."

Stormkit's ears twitched and she looked over at Flowerkit. "Can you walk?" She asked, her gaze intense.

Flowerkit had tried the day before, only to be met with the same pain. *I could I try.* Flowerkit began standing up, but the moment she placed her injured leg on the floor, pain shot through. She quickly stopped and flopped down in her nest. "No." Flowerkit mewed, feeling and sounding defeated. *What happens if I can't become an apprentice?* She closed her eyes and flattened her ears.

She heard a sad sigh from Stormkit, but more pawsteps were approaching the medicine cat den. Flowerkit opened her eyes and lifted her head to see the gray fur of her father, Stonewhisker. Her spirits instantly lifted as she saw her father. His amber eyes looked at his two daughters with love. "How are you feeling, Flowerkit?"

"Her leg is still broken!" Stormkit complained. "I thought it was a medicine cat's *job* to heal cats, and yet Flowerkit still can't walk! Our apprentice ceremony is only a few days."

"Stormkit," Stonewhisker nudged Stormkit. "You're being rude. It is a medicine cat's job to heal but they can't perform miracles. Flowerkit's ankle will heal with time, if we try and force it then her leg could be permanently injured. She'll be healed in time."

"In a few days?" Her blue eyes still held onto hope.

Stonewhisker sighed. "Perhaps, but don't keep your hopes up. We just need to allow Flowerkit to heal."

Flowerkit felt guilty, Stormkit was really upset with the fact that she might not be able to become an apprentice on time and Flowerkit was upset about it too. *Would Foxstar postpone Stormkit's apprenticeship too? I wouldn't want that.* Flowerkit rested her chin on her paws, she hoped that her leg would heal soon, but she doubted that it would happen in just a few days.

Stonewhisker looked over at Flowerkit, catching her eye. "As for you," He padded over to Flowerkit's nest and rested his tail across her shoulders. "You keep your head up, I know it's hard being stuck in here but you'll be out of here before you know it."

Flowerkit felt slightly cheered up by her father's words, but there was still something bugging her. She was terrified of dragging Stormkit behind, she didn't want her sister to have to sacrifice her own apprentice ceremony because of her injury. "I'll try." Flowerkit responded, hoping to make her father happy. He didn't seem totally convinced, and neither did Stormkit. Flowerkit had to stay happy, and she had to make sure that Stormkit would be having her apprentice ceremony even if it was without her.

Flowerkit sat up in her nest, testing her ability to stand up. It wasn't easy, pain still spread through her body if she tried to stand on all fours. It wasn't as bad, but it was too much to stand. She sighed and stared at her paws, she could walk around but not without a heavy limp.

"I'm sorry, Flowerkit." A sad voice came from across the medicine cat den, Flowerkit looked up at Feathernose was sorting herbs. "I wish I could do more, but if you become an apprentice today you really won't be able to do much training. You'll have to wait." His green eyes were filled with sadness.

Flowerkit sat back down. "It's okay, Feathernose." She sighed sadly. "It's not your fault, I know you and Honeypaw are doing your best."

"The only good news I can provide is that it is getting better. The swelling has gone down a lot in the past moon, perhaps by next moon it will be healed enough for you to become an apprentice." Feathernose explained, which did make Flowerkit feel a little bit better, but it still didn't give her what she wanted now.

"Flowerkit!" Normally, Stormkit' mew brought her joy and excitement but now it made her heart drop into her paws. She had to tell Stormkit that she would not be made an apprentice today. Stormkit burst into the medicine cat den, her blue eyes filled with excitement. "It's almost time for the ceremony. Did Feathernose say you could become an apprentice?"

The moment that Stormkit met Flowerkit's gaze she knew. She dropped her head and her ears flattened. "I'm sorry, Stormkit." Flowerkit said quietly. "I won't be made an apprentice today."

"But," Stormkit whimpered, looking at her silver paws. She stayed silent for a few, long moments making Flowerkit feel even more guilty for having to deal with this injury. After a long moment, Stormkit looked up "Do you want me to wait? So we can become apprentices together?"

Flowerkit's heart twisted, this is what she feared. "No, I don't want you to wait." Flowerkit replied, her voice cracking. "I want you to become an apprentice and enjoy being an apprentice."

Stormkit's ears flattened. "But I don't want to do it alone. I want you to be an apprentice with me."

Flowerkit stood up and awkwardly limped over to her sister, touching her nose to Stormkit's forehead. "You won't be along for too long, Feathernose said that I could be ready to go in a moon. It would only be for a moon, and then you could teach me everything you learned."

Stormkit looked at her, her blue eyes slightly lighter but Stormkit was clearly not happy about this situation. *I'm not happy either.* Flowerkit thought sadly. *But I refuse to hold you back too, Stormkit.* "Go have your ceremony, and save me a place in the apprentice den." Stormkit looked grateful and nodded.

"Will you be at my ceremony." She questioned, sounding sheepish.

"Of course I will." Flowerkit purred. "As long as you'll be at mine."

"I promise." Stormkit rubbed gently up against Flowerkit.

"You should go get ready." Flowerkit nudged her sister gently towards the entrance. "I'll be out there when the ceremony starts."

"Alright!" Stormkit's mood seemed to be better, she turned and ran out of the medicine cat den and towards the nursery to prepare with Dovewish.

Flowerkit watched her sister go, feeling somewhat better knowing that Stormkit would be having her apprentice ceremony on time, but had an aching feeling of sadness that she would not be having it with her.

"That's very kind of you to tell her to have her ceremony without her." Feathernose added.

"I don't want to hold her back." Flowerkit said, staring out into the camp. "She'll be a great warrior and I want her to start as soon as possible. I'll be an apprentice here soon."

"That's very noble." Feathernose brushed his fluffy tail across Flowerstar's back. From outside the den, Foxstar's call could be heard; gathering the Clan together.

"Can I go watch?" Flowerkit looked up at Feathernose, hoping to stay true to her promise of attending Stormkit's ceremony.

"Yes." Feathernose stood up. "You may be six moons old but you're still a kit, so you'll be watching from outside the den." Feeling her spirits lift, Flowerkit stood up and began hobbling alongside Feathernose outside of the medicine cat den. The Clan was gathering and Stormkit sat in the middle, just before the SunTree.

Foxstar sat above the Clan and Mallownose was at the base, looking over her Clan. Flowerkit had to stop herself from running in excitement towards the Clan. She spotted Dovewish sitting close together as they watched Stormkit. Dovewish looked over towards the medicine cat den and cast a loving look towards Flowerkit.

Stormkit spotted her as well, looking incredibly excited. Despite the fact that Flowerkit knew she should be having her ceremony now as well, she felt a lot of excitement for Stormkit to make up for her own disappointment.

"Today is a proud day for SunClan," Foxstar began speaking, Stormkit squirmed in place. "By naming apprentices we know that we will remain strong for many moons to come." Stormkit stared up, her eyes as bright as the sun. "Stormkit, you have reached the age of six moons, and it is timed for you to be apprenticed. From

this day forward, until you receive your warrior name you will be known as Stormpaw." Flowerkit watched the newly named, Stormpaw. She looked so proud and excited. *I'm so happy for you, sister.* "Your mentor will be Firetail, she was my apprentice I trust that she will teach you everything you need to know to become the best warrior you can be."

Firetail, a she-cat with fiery red fur stepped forward. Her green eyes were bright and excited, full of joy. She touched her nose to Stormpaw's and the two looked at each other with happiness. "Stormpaw! Stormpaw! Stormpaw!" Flowerkit cheered especially loud for her sister, watching from the medicine cat den.

I'm so happy for you. Flowerkit felt warm, watching her sister jump around Firetail in excitement. *Soon, I'll be training with you. I just have to be patient.*

Chapter 4

"Try it once more." Feathernose instructed, watching Flowerkit closely. Flowerkit pressed her injured paw down on the floor. There was a feeling of stiffness, but not so much pain anymore. "How does it feel."

"It doesn't really hurt." Flowerkit explained. "It feels weird though." She looked up Feathernose, wondering if she should be concerned about the feeling.

"It's great that you don't feel pain." Feathernose said, giving her ankle a sniff and touching his paw gently to it. "That means the bone is healed. It will feel weird for a while as you start to walk again."

"So it's healed?" Flowerkit nearly jumped with excitement, she looked at her ankle that had kept her down for so long. It had been almost a whole moon since Stormpaw's apprentice ceremony and now the pain was going away.

"Pretty much." Feathernose said cheerfully. "You can return to nursery today." Flowerkit stopped, her excitement dying nearly instantly.

"The nursery? Can't I become an apprentice?" Flowerkit looked at the medicine cat, feeling somewhat disappointed.

"I meant to talk about this with you before, I've discussed it with your mother and Foxstar." Flowerkit blinked. "But, we've wondered if you would like to become apprenticed with Nightwing's kits. You would have to wait just a bit longer, but at least you wouldn't be made an apprentice alone."

Flowerkit thought for a moment, she knew that despite Stormpaw having her ceremony alone she still enjoyed it, but Flowerkit had the option of having a ceremony with others. They weren't siblings, but Flowerkit did consider the five kits her friends. They had come

to visit her several times while she had been confined to the medicine cat den.

"Okay." Flowerkit nodded, looking up at Feathernose. "I like that idea, plus it will give my ankle even more time to heal."

"Exactly." Feathernose purred. "Now, why don't you head on back to the nursery. You're able to walk there yourself now." Flowerkit nodded and stepped outside of the medicine cat den, breathing in the fresh-air of the SunClan camp. She looked towards the nursery where Thornkit and his littermates were playing. She twitched her tail with excitement and began padding over to them. Her walking was somewhat uneven and clumsy, but she managed.

Rainkit was the first one to spot her, she looked up with excited blue eyes. "Flowerkit!" She exclaimed, pulling the attention of her four littermates. "You're walking again!"

"Are you better now?" Crowkit asked, jumping to her paws and watching Flowerkit's movements.

"I am!" Flowerkit reached the group of kits who all looked incredibly happy to see her. "Feathernose told me I was okay to leave the medicine cat den."

"That's awesome." Thornkit twitched his ears playfully. "Does that mean you're going to become an apprentice now?"

Flowerkit nodded. "Well, not right away. I'm actually going to be having my apprentice ceremony with you guys."

"Awesome!" Bramblekit exclaimed, jumping around playfully. "It's gonna be such a big, fun ceremony and we'll all get to train together." Flowerkit felt their excitement, though she was nervous about jumping around the way that he was.

"Oh yeah," Tigerkit said suddenly. "Your mother left the nursery just a bit before Stormpaw became an apprentice, so I don't know if she'll come back but we have two more she-cats in here now."

Flowerkit tilted her head. "Really?" Two new queens had moved into the nursery? Flowerkit hadn't heard anything about it, she

wondered who they were. Flowerkit followed Tigerkit and poked her head into the nursery where Nightwing was talking with Tallfern and Marshpelt. Neither of them looked like they were very close to having their kits.

"Welcome back, Flowerkit." Nightwing greeted Flowerkit kindly. "Are you coming back to stay with us?"

Flowerkit nodded, looking at Tallfern and Marshpelt with interest. "I'm going to be made apprentices along with Tigerkit and the others."

"So I've heard." Nightwing purred. "It will be quite the ceremony, most apprentice ceremonies don't involve six different cats. Flowerkit nodded, the excitement coming back to her. Flowerkit turned back outside where the kits were playing, she felt like playing with them right now was a good idea, she didn't want to risk hurting her leg again. *I'm going to become an apprentice.*

She watched them play for quite a while, but their attention was drawn to somewhere else when she saw the Clan starting to gather in front of camp. "What's going on?" Crowkit questioned, tilting her head at the Clan. "Is there a Clan meeting."

"It's the full moon." Tallfern mewed behind them. "They're getting ready for the gathering."

"The gathering?" Bramblekit looked over at the queen. "Isn't that when the four Clans gather and share news."

"That's exactly what it is." Tallfern nodded. "They're getting ready to leave." She looked over her shoulder. "Are you coming, Marshpelt?"

"I am." The mottled brown she-cat stepped into the open and stood beside Tallfern. "We should join them quickly."

"Can't we go?" Thornkit asked, his eyes looking eager.

"I'm afraid not." Marshpelt nudged him. "When you're an apprentice you'll get to go, but kits need to stay in camp."

"But we're part of the Clan too." Thornkit lashed his tiny, spiky tail.

"We should be allowed to do Clan things."

"You are part of the Clan." Tallfern mewed. "But it's the same reason you can't hunt, train or even join Clan meetings. You're too young."

Thornkit snorted. "But what about Flowerkit," Flowerkit blinked, feeling awkward that Thornkit was singling her out. "She's almost seven moons old, could she go?"

Marshpelt looked at Flowerkit. "I'm afraid not, she's still a kit. Not to mention she just got out of the medicine cat den for having an injury, I wouldn't recommend her making that kind of walk just yet."

Thornkit slumped over, pouting while Flowerkit looked at her leg. Would a walk like that actually hurt her? "Sorry, kits." Tallfern said, nudging Thornkit who just looked annoyed. "When you're apprentices then you can see a gathering. The two queens walked past them and towards the group of cats. Flowerkit looked over at the Clan, she saw Stormpaw bouncing around Stonewhisker and Dovewish. For a moment, Flowerkit felt alone. *I should be going to the gathering with my family.* She dropped her head, looking at her paws. *Just one more moon, and I will be at my sister's side like I should be.*

Flowerkit sat in the nursery, trying to fall asleep. It had been quite a while since the Clan left for the gathering and the moon was now high in the sky. She had nearly dozed off, but woke up when she heard the shifting of moss. She lifted her head, but didn't see any movement. Nightwing's kits were curled up sleeping, but Nightwing herself had returned to the warrior's den to sleep.

No. Flowerkit tensed. *There's someone missing.* Flowerkit looked over the sleeping shapes of Nightwing's kits. She counted only four of them, who was missing? Flowerkit saw the two black pelts of Crowkit and Rainkit and the brown pelts of Tigerkit and Bramblekit, but Thornkit was nowhere in sight. Flowerkit sat up and looked around, trying to spot where he was.

She climbed out of her nest and poked her head outside in the silent camp, the cats who remained in the camp were all sleeping by now.

Thornkit, where did you go? She questioned and began searching around camp, her nerves starting to rise. *He's not here! Did he leave?* Flowerkit quickly moved back over to the nursery and approached the sleeping kits.

She placed her paw on Tigerkit's shoulder. "Tigerkit." She said in a panicked whisper. "Tigerkit!" She said slightly louder. Tigerkit jumped and looked up in alarm, also looking incredibly tired.

"Flowerkit...?" He yawned. "What's going on?" Flowerkit's method of waking up Tigerkit had also roused the other three kits.

"Thornkit is missing." She explained. "I can't find him anywhere." Tigerkit was immediately awake, he sat up and looked around in a panic, his littermates were also wide awake now.

"Where is he?" Rainkit looked around, sounding slightly panicked. "He didn't get taken by a fox or something did he?"

"I feel like if there *was* a fox," Crowkit mewed, trying to calm her sister. "It wouldn't take just one kit when there's a bunch of us." Flowerkit couldn't help but agree, if Thornkit was gone it would probably be because he ran off on his own.

"I know where he is." Bramblekit twitched his ears, looking out of the nursery entrance. "He went to the gathering."

"The gathering?" Flowerkit echoed. Did Thornkit really run off to the gathering? How would he even know where it was.

"Did you see him leave?" Crowkit questioned. "Did he tell you that he was going there?"

"No," Bramblekit turned to Crowkit. "But he was upset that he couldn't go, and it's the only explanation as to where he would go. There's no queens in the nursery right now, he would be able to leave without being caught."

Flowerkit looked at her paws for a moment, hoping that he would be safe and not get himself killed or injured. "What do we do?" She questioned her denmates, concern filling her heart.

"We just have to wait." Bramblekit replied. "If we leave then we risk getting in trouble ourselves, we have to wait for either him to return or for them to bring him back."

"What if he gets hurt?" Rainkit asked with a worried squeak. "Or he gets lost? He's never left the camp before."

"Thornkit is smart," Tigerkit brushed up against Rainkit. "He won't get hurt and he won't get lost. Don't be scared, he's a brave kit."

"I wouldn't call him smart." Bramblekit snorted. "He's being a big idiot for pulling a stunt like this, I can guarantee that Hawktalon and Nightwing will not be happy with him."

Flowerkit couldn't help but agree, especially after Tallfern and Marshpelt told him specifically that he wasn't allowed to attend the gathering and then he sneaks off to go anyway. Flowerkit twitched her tail and looked out into the camp. He hoped that he was safe, despite Tigerkit's word she couldn't help but feel paranoid. *He may be smart but he's still just a kit.* Flowerkit closed her eyes, hoping and praying to StarClan that he would be okay.

"Someone's coming!" Rainkit called, making Flowerkit jump. She rose to her paws and went to stand beside the black she-cat. It had been a while since Flowerkit discovered that Thornkit was missing and they had stopped to wait for him to come back to make sure he was alright.

The rest of the kits ran over to Rainkit and Flowerkit as well, looking towards the camp entrance. It didn't look like the whole Clan, however. The moon only cast three shadows across the forest floor and one of them was small. Flowerkit narrowed her eyes and soon recognized the tabby pelts of Hawktalon, Thornkit and Falconclaw, Thornkit's uncle. Hawktalon and Falconclaw both looked incredibly angry, and Thornkit walked with his head low.

"I guess he was found out." Tigertail said quietly. "I wonder what Hawktalon and Falconclaw will do now."

Flowerkit tensed as they grew closer and the kits that were watching quickly scrambled back to their nests. Flowerkit crouched

down into her nest and waited for the two warriors to arrive. Thornkit stepped into the den with his head low.

"I don't what made you think running away from the camp was a good idea, Thornkit." Hawktalon growled, staring down his son. "You could've been killed."

Thornkit faced his father, lashing his tail. "I wouldn't have died. SunClan territory isn't *that* dangerous." He grumbled.

"You could've fallen into the river and drowned!" Flowerkit winced as Hawktalon shouted.

"But I didn't! I'm smart enough to know how to cross a river." Thornkit looked at the floor, clearly annoyed and clearly ashamed.

"But you're not smart enough to follow the rules." Falconclaw growled, his amber eyes burning with anger. Flowerkit tensed even more, Hawktalon was intimidating but something about Falconclaw just made her feel uneasy. He was an incredibly large and intimidating warrior. He also had a long scar going down his face, near his right eye and down his muzzle. "Any cat with half a brain knows to follow the rules. We will let Foxstar figure out your punishment, if it were up to me I would make it to where you couldn't be an apprentice at all!"

Thornkit's jaw dropped but he didn't reply, he dropped into his nest and turned away. "I hope you think about what you've done, Thornkit." Hawktalon said, his voice sounding incredibly disappointed. "Maybe next time you won't be so reckless."

Hawktalon and Falconclaw turned away, going back out into the camp, leaving the rest of the kits feeling incredibly awkward. Flowerkit looked at Thornkit, he had buried his face under his paw.

"Why did you leave, Thornkit?" Bramblekit questioned his brother, looking both concerned and annoyed.

"I don't want to talk about it, you wouldn't understand." Thornkit grumbled.

"Try me." Bramblekit twitched his whiskers.

Thornkit lifted his head, amber eyes burning. "I wanted to prove that I could."

Chapter 5

"I'm so excited!" Stormpaw ran around Flowerkit, her blue eyes bursting with joy. "You're finally going to be an apprentice!" She pushed up against Flowerkit. "Are you excited, too?"
"Of course I am!" Flowerkit exclaimed, bouncing around with her sister. I've waited a whole extra moon!" She honestly couldn't wait for it, the past few days had been endless patience, but the day was finally here.

Flowerkit looked into the nursery while Nightwing prepared her kits for the ceremony as well, Dovewish had done that earlier and now watched on as Flowerkit and Stormpaw waited together. Thornkit had been punished for his attempt at running away to the gathering, but Foxstar decided not to postpone his apprentice ceremony. He was, however, confined to the nursery and was to be watched at all times. He would also not allowed to attend the next gathering as punishment for him not waiting.

Flowerkit was still excited that he didn't get held back from being an apprentice, she knew how hard that was and didn't want her friend to have to deal with it as well. Flowerkit turned her gaze away as Nightwing fussed with Thornkit's spiky fur.

"It's time." Dovewish motioned towards Foxstar as he left the SunTree, preparing to call the Clan to gather. Dovewish looked down at Flowerkit. "I'm so happy both my kits are finally apprentices, you've been so patient to wait this long, Flowerkit." Dovewish nuzzled Flowerkit lovingly. "I'm proud of you." Flowerkit purred, feeling loved. She knew that her father would be waiting for her when the ceremony started and she knew he was just as proud of her.

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath the SunTree for a Clan meeting!" Foxstar's call rang out through the trees, making Flowerkit's heart leap. She looked to her denmates who were all scrambling out of the nursery in excitement. Nightwing followed while Tallfern and Marshpelt watched on in

interest, their bellies had gotten slightly bigger but it would be awhile before they had their kits.

"Let's go!" Flowerkit called to her friends who all looked as excited as she felt. "Are you ready?" She questioned them.

"Of course!" Bramblekit exclaimed, his eyes shimmering.

"Then let's stop waiting!" Thornkit said playfully and pushed Bramblekit forward. The large group of kits started running towards the Clan who had all gathered. Flowerkit spotted Stonewhisker who looked at her proudly and lovingly. Stormpaw and Dovewish sat beside him, watching with excitement.

Flowerkit sat with the other kits as they waited for the ceremony to officially begin. Foxstar looked down at them with happiness. "Today is a proud day for SunClan, by naming apprentices we show that SunClan will remain strong for many moons to come. It's not often that we name six apprentices in one day, but I am incredibly happy to do so. We know that SunClan will have no shortage of brave warriors." The cats of SunClan chattered with agreement, Flowerkit shared an excited glance with Thornkit, they would be brave warriors! All of them.

"Flowerkit, Tigerkit, Bramblekit, Thornkit, Rainkit and Crowkit. You have all reached the age of six moons -- some even a little older." Foxstar chuckled, looking at Flowerkit. "And it is time for you to become apprentices." Foxstar looked over the kits proudly. "Tigerkit, from this day forward, until you have earned your warrior name, you will be known as Tigerpaw. Your mentor will be Mallownose."

The SunClan deputy, Mallownose, stepped forward and looked at Tigerpaw with joy filled green eyes. "Mallownose," Foxstar continued. "As my deputy and as the mentor of Moonfur, I know that you will teach everything you know to young Tigerpaw."

Mallownose and Tigerpaw touched noses before going off to the side, leaving five more kits to be apprenticed. Flowerkit could hardly contain her excitement.

"Bramblekit, from this day forward you will be known as Bramblepaw." Bramblepaw's amber eyes glowed. "Fernsong, you have shown to be an incredibly brave warrior and I trust your abilities to teach an apprentice. You will be Bramblepaw mentor." Fernsong, a golden-brown she-cat stepped forward and touched noses with Bramblepaw before he joined Tigerpaw.

"Crowkit, from this day forward you will be known as Crowpaw. Your mentor will be Rockfall." Rockfall was a large, dark gray warrior with striking yellow eyes. He greeted Crowpaw kindly and they touched noses. "I know you will be a wonderful mentor to Crowpaw."

"Thornkit, from this day forward you will be known as Thornpaw. Though, this is a bit unusual and kin normally don't mentor kin, but your mentor will be Falconclaw. Falconclaw is an incredibly brave and talented warrior and I know he will mentor you well." Thornpaw faced his uncle, they shared a glance and touched noses before Thornpaw joined his littermates.

"Rainkit, from this forward you will be known as Rainpaw. Your mentor will be Stonewhisker, I trust him to teach you all that he knows." Flowerkit watched with joy as her father was chosen as Rainpaw's mentor. *I'll be able to train with my father as well!* She realized with happiness.

"Flowerkit," Flowerkit's attention was pulled to Foxstar. It was finally her turn. "You have waited a whole moon longer due to an injury, and your Clanmates commend you for that." She felt the warm gazes of her Clanmates. "From this day forward, you will be known as Flowerpaw. Your mentor will be Owlfoot. He is an incredibly talented warrior and I trust him to teach you all that you need."

Flowerpaw faced Owlfoot, he was a large warrior with light brown fur and mossy green eyes. His front paws were large and darker brown. Flowerpaw reached her head forward and touched her nose to Owlfoot's. He had a kind look in his eyes and Flowerpaw felt comforted by him, she was excited to be his apprentice. Flowerpaw stepped back and looked over her shoulder at her family, Stonewhisker had rejoined them.

"I proudly welcome all of our brand new apprentices." Foxstar called out one last time, looking over the Clan.

"Tigerpaw! Bramblepaw! Crowpaw! Thornpaw! Rainpaw! Flowerpaw!" The cats of SunClan cheered, it felt as if sunlight was beaming directly in Flowerpaw's heart. She had waited so long to become an apprentice and now she finally was one! She turned and bounded over to Dovewish, Stonewhisker and Stormpaw.

"How does it feel to finally be an apprentice?" Stormpaw questioned excitedly, turning circles around Flowerpaw.

"It feels awesome!" Flowerpaw exclaimed. "I can't wait to start my training." Flowerpaw said and looked over at Owlfoot who was waiting patiently.

"Well you should get to your mentor." Stonewhisker purred. "I know I have an apprentice to take out as well. I'm taking Rainpaw out hunting."

Flowerpaw hoped that she would be hunting as well, she turned to go and ask Owlfoot where they would be going. She faced her mentor's kind green eyes. "What are we going to do first?" She asked, sure she would be happy with whatever the answer was. Even if it was something like collecting moss.

"I think that we will go on a tour of the territory. I heard that Rockfall was planning to do the same with Crowpaw so you two can go together." Owlfoot replied. "You need to learn the territory in order to hunt in it." Flowerpaw agreed, her paws itched to see the territory.

Flowerpaw looked over the others who had just become apprentices as well. Rainpaw and Tigerpaw had now gathered with Stonewhisker and Mallownose as they prepared to go hunting. Over near Hawktalon, Falconclaw and Fernsong were standing with Thornpaw and Bramblepaw, though Falconclaw didn't look particularly happy about something.

"Are you two going to join us?" Flowerpaw heard the voice of Rockfall and turned to see him standing with a very excited

Crowpaw.

"We are." Owlfoot replied with a slight purr. "We should head out so we can cover as much of the territory as possible. We live in quite a big territory." He looked at the two new apprentices. "Let's go!"

Flowerpaw walked beside Crowpaw as they made their way to the entrance of camp. The sun was high and they had the whole day to explore the territory and Flowerpaw wanted to see every single tree and leaf that lined SunClan's territory and even beyond it. *I want to see it all!*

Flowerpaw, Crowpaw and their mentors exited the camp and the sight of the forest took her breath away. The scent of trees and prey washed over her and it seemed to extend forever. She breathed in the scent of her home and looking around. It was early leaf-fall and the leaves were just starting to change colors. She stared in awe, it was better than she ever expected.

Flowerpaw glanced over at Crowpaw who seemed to be just as amazed. Her amber eyes looked around with a sense of wonder. Flowerpaw turned back to the forest ahead of her, the air was slightly chilly but the ground felt soft beneath her paws. Her heart raced slightly, she just wanted to take off and run around this amazing forest.

"Where are we going first?" Crowpaw questioned the two warriors. "Are we going to see the whole territory today?"

"We're going to see the AshClan border first and walk along there. We won't see everything, but we could possibly make it to the MoonClan border." Rockfall replied, looking over his shoulder at Crowpaw and Flowerpaw. "However, we won't see the back of the territory. That's for another day."

"Either way," Crowpaw mewed, her voice shaking with excitement. She glanced over at Flowerpaw with sparkling eyes. "We still get to see the territory, we're no longer stuck inside the camp." Flowerpaw agreed with Crowpaw, she had a whole new sense of freedom. No longer confined to the camp and with only her dreams to explore. Now she could see the world with her own two paws.

Flowerpaw and Crowpaw followed their mentors through the forest until a strange scent filled their noses. It smelled like cats, but different and slightly more foul. In the distance, the trees of SunClan's territory stopped and instead there was towering pine trees.

"This is the AshClan border." Owlfoot explained. "Lately, AshClan cats have been causing quite an issue with us. So be careful not to cross it and report to a warrior if you see anything suspicious." Flowerpaw looked over the border. AshClan was causing problems? Would that lead to a battle, she tensed up slightly hoping that wouldn't be the case.

"What issues are they causing?" Crowpaw questioned. "Are they stealing prey or crossing the border?"

Rockfall shook his head. "Not anything like that." He replied. "They're just pushing the limits of the border and Goldenstar was incredibly hostile during the last gathering." Rockfall and Owlfoot shared a look. "She and all of her warriors. I'm hoping that they don't try anything."

Flowerpaw looked at Crowpaw who looked equally concerned, they didn't have any battle training and Flowerpaw wasn't sure if she wanted to fight at all. *I'll fight for my Clan.* She thought. *I'd just prefer not to.* She twitched her ears and continued following her mentors

They walked along the forest, seeing the river border that led to the gathering hollow. *This is where Thornpaw ran off to. He crossed the river all on his own.* Flowerpaw thought as they passed it and continued to see more of the territory.

They had walked nearly all day and Owlfoot said that they were nearing the MoonClan territory, but pain was starting to claw at her ankle. Flowerpaw did her best to ignore the pain, but soon found herself limping. *Not like this.* She clenched her jaws, the pain almost becoming too much. However, her Clanmates soon noticed her limp.

"Flowerpaw," Owlfoot looked at her with concern in his green eyes. "Are you alright? You're limping."

Crowpaw looked at her nervously. "Is it your ankle? Did you hurt it again?" Her amber eyes went down to Flowerpaw's paw that she had been favoring.

"I don't think so." Flowerpaw looked at her paw, feeling anxious. *Maybe it really wasn't healed.* "But it is starting to hurt."

"It's probably not broken again." Rockfall pointed out. "You've only recently had it healed, but it's easy to aggravate old injures like that. I dislocated my shoulder when I was apprentice and even now it sometimes hurts to walk for a long time." Rockfall cast his yellow eyes up towards the sky. "We should head back, we don't want to hurt the injury too much."

Flowerpaw looked at the floor, feeling incredibly guilty. "We don't have to, I'll be okay." Her paw hurt, but she didn't want to end Crowpaw's training early because of her injury.

"It's getting late anyway." Owlfoot assured her. "We can see the rest of the territory tomorrow, you two should get back and get some food in your bellies." Uncertainty clawed at Flowerpaw's heart, she couldn't help but still feel guilty. She glanced up at Crowpaw, who didn't appeared to be bothered. Despite all that, Flowerpaw still felt bad.

Owlfoot and Rockfall led their apprentices back to SunClan camp, but Flowerpaw's leg continued to hurt her. Her limp had grown quite heavy and she wanted nothing more than to just lay down and rest it.

They reached the camp and Flowerpaw fought the urge to just fall over there. Upon stepping into camp, Flowerpaw noticed that Foxstar was facing the apprentices of the Clan. "What's going on?" She questioned as they neared the group of apprentices.

Stormpaw looked over her shoulder. "The apprentice den isn't big enough for six new apprentices. It's almost doubled since you all became apprentices. We're trying to decide what to do."

"There's another den outside of camp that we sometimes use to house sick cats." Foxstar mewed. "We could put half our apprentices

in there if we get them some nests."

"What cats would stay there?" Applepaw questioned, looking at her sister, Sandpaw curiously.

"That would be up to you group." Foxstar mewed, looking over the large group of apprentices.

"Well," A golden she-cat named Sunpaw, Honeypaw's sister, stepped forward. "We're going to become warriors before they will." She motioned her head towards where the new apprentices stood. "It wouldn't be fare to make them sleep there and then make them move back when we become warriors."

"I agree." Slatepaw, a dark gray tom stepped forward, nodded his head. "The older apprentices should stay in the den, plus I think it's bigger anyway."

"So, Applepaw, Sandpaw, Goldenpaw, Slatepaw, Cloudpaw and Stormpaw will move to the new den?" Foxstar checked.

"Um," Stormpaw stepped forward looking slightly awkward. "If it's okay, I'd like to stay in this den so I can stay with my sister." Flowerpaw looked at Stormpaw gratefully.

"That's fine by me." Cloudpaw mewed. "I wouldn't want to be separated from Slatepaw.
She glanced over at her brother.

"Then," Foxstar gathered the apprentices that would be moving to the nursery. "We can gather moss for your new nests and we will take you all out there." Flowerpaw sat down, watching them pad away towards the back entrance of SunClan's camp, beside Feathernose's den.

"How was your first day as an apprentice." Stormpaw asked cheerfully, slipping in beside Flowerpaw. Crowpaw had also joined her own littermates and were talking about their days.

"It was fun." Flowerpaw purred, and up until the point her leg started hurting. "We saw almost the whole front part of the territory."

"Awesome!" Stormpaw yawned, but still looked just as excited. "Soon, you'll know the entire territory by heart." Flowerpaw's heart ached slightly, they were training together now but Stormpaw had a whole moon of training that Flowerpaw didn't. *What if she becomes a warrior before me? We always wanted to have the same warrior ceremony.* She looked at her paws.

"Come on," Stormpaw nudged her to her paws. "Let's get some sleep, I'll make a nest for you." Flowerpaw nodded, shoving down her fears. *Even if we don't become warriors together, until then we will be apprentices together. And that's all I could ever ask for.*

Chapter 6

"*Hold your body still, and* step lightly. A mouse will feel the vibrations in the ground if you step too hard." Owlfoot explained, Flowerpaw placed her paw on the forest floor. Shifting a leaf slightly. "Too hard, if I can hear the leaf from where I am then I know for a fact that a mouse would be able to hear you." Flowerpaw looked at the leaf, trying to focus on making her pawsteps lighter. *How am I supposed to step any lighter than I am? I'll move like a turtle!* Despite everything, she tried stepping once more. "Still too hard." Owlfoot said sternly. "You're rushing yourself, you're trying to make it go by quickly.

Owlfoot crouched down beside Flowerpaw, placing his paw forward. It was essentially silent, not making any sound and not moving any leaves on the ground. Flowerpaw watched everything about his paw steps. *Don't rush it.* She told herself. Flowerpaw looked at the forest floor, taking another step but moving slowly and setting it down gingerly.

"Better." Owlfoot nodded. "Now try creeping forward, every paw step needs to be silent. It may take a while for you to catch the mouse, but if you rush then you won't catch it at all." Flowerpaw nodded and began moving forward, making sure her pawsteps were silent. "I understand it may be difficult now and you're focusing very hard on stepping lightly. Soon, though, it will come as natural to you as breathing."

Flowerpaw wondered how she could get used to stepping so lightly, but she would certainly try. She kept moving forward with her silent pawsteps until she had moved several foxlengths away from Owlfoot. "Not bad, you're getting better." Flowerpaw stood up, feeling more confident in herself from Owlfoot's praise. "Each piece of prey is different, that's why the other Clans might hunt things that SunClan cats don't. For example; MoonClan cats hunt rabbits because they're faster than we are. LichenClan cats like hunting birds, they have powerful legs that allow them to jump farther.

AshClan cats eat a lot of prey similar to us, but have different techniques to deal with their different territory." Owlfoot sniffed the air. "However, if it's in our territory and you see a chance to catch it, feel free to catch any kind of prey. No cat will turn their nose up at prey."

"Will I learn from you how to catch rabbits?" Flowerpaw questioned, tilting her head.

"I'll teach you once you have mastered other hunting methods, rabbits don't frequently cross into our territory so you'll need to know how to catch what's in our territory. Squirrels, mice, voles and birds." Owlfoot looked around, his green eyes scanning the forest. He turned back and looked down at Flowerpaw who was still thinking about her hunting techniques. "Let's head back to camp, we'll be joining a patrol here shortly. Get something to eat and prepare to leave."

Flowerpaw didn't complain, she began following her mentor through the forest and back towards SunClan's camp. "When will I actually go hunting?" Flowerpaw questioned, she had been an apprentice for a few days now and had just spent the past few days learning how to hunt but hadn't practiced her skills on actual prey yet. She wanted to hunt, she wanted to provide for her Clan. *That's why I'm an apprentice.* She was already way behind her sister when it came to training and she wanted to catch up.

"Probably tomorrow." Owlfoot replied. "I know you want to hunt but I want you to take your time, you have several moons before you'll become a warrior. Good warriors aren't made by rushing, they're made by patience and learning." Flowerpaw snorted. *Does he ever stop meowing about patience.* She twitched her ears and silenced herself, not speaking the entire walk back to camp.

Flowerpaw stepped into camp and watched Owlfoot approach his mate, Firetail. Flowerpaw turned away, scanning the camp to see who was all here. She spotted Sunpaw sharing a piece of prey with Honeypaw outside the medicine cat den, Tallfern and Marshpelt were sunning themselves outside the nursery, their bellies slowly growing in size. Flowerpaw was excited for more kits, but SunClan didn't really have the room for any more apprentices.

Flowerpaw's eyes traveled to the back of camp where she spotted Stormpaw and Applepaw entering camp with bundles of moss in their jaws. Judging from the light of humor in their eyes, they seemed to be pretty close. *She's been an apprentice for a whole moon, it's not strange that she would have befriended one of the apprentices.* The familiar uneasy feeling of feeling left out clawed at Flowerpaw's heart once more. *We're the same age,* She thought sadly. *But it feels like Stormpaw is moons ahead of me, like we're two different ages.* She dropped her head slightly, she hoped that this feeling wouldn't last.

Stormpaw and Applepaw went to the elder's den and nursery to deliver their moss. While they did that, Flowerpaw grabbed herself a mouse from the fresh-kill pile to eat. She brought it to the apprentice den where she began to quickly eat it before the patrol was going to set off.

She took a bite and heard the rustling of the camp's entrance as Falconclaw and Thornpaw returned from their training. Flowerpaw lifted her head and watched as Falconclaw dismissed Thornpaw. She caught his amber gaze and he approached her, looking incredibly exhausted. "How's it going?" She greeted kindly.

"Tiring." Thornpaw let out a yawn and sat down beside her. "I've been out training since dawn."

"Dawn?" Flowerpaw felt a pang of sympathy for Thornpaw, it was late afternoon and he had just returned home from training. "What kind of training takes that long to do."

"Falconclaw's kind of training." He grumbled, twitching his tail in annoyance. "His training is endless, it doesn't matter if it's hunting or fighting he takes it way too seriously." Thornpaw sighed, lifting his head and gazed towards the sky. "I love providing for my Clan, but training shouldn't make me feel like I'm going to die."

"I'm sorry." Flowerpaw looked at the tired apprentice, his body looked slumped and his eyes were dull with exhaustion. She also noticed a semi-fresh looking scratch down his shoulder. "What happened there?" She motioned towards the injury.

Thornpaw looked at his shoulder, giving the wound a slight sniff. "I

tripped over a log, a sharp rock scratched me. It's not a big deal, it didn't really hurt." He shrugged and looked back towards the camp. "Injuries happen." He turned his head, looking at Flowerpaw with a slightly playful gleam in his amber eyes. "You of all cats should know that."

Flowerpaw nudged him playfully, laughing slightly. "True, but at least yours didn't make you stay in the medicine cat den for four moons."

"That is very true." Thornpaw chuckled and let out a yawn. His looked to his left where Flowerpaw saw Owlfoot approaching them.

"I suppose that's him coming to get me for a patrol." She quickly ate the rest of of her mouse and stood up. Flowerpaw glanced over her shoulder at Thornpaw. "You should get some rest and maybe get that scratch checked out." Thornpaw nodded and Flowerpaw met up with Owlfoot. "Is it time for the patrol?" She questioned.

Owlfoot nodded. "Yes, we'll be joining Flintstripe, Slatepaw, Alderfang, Nightwing and Frostclaw." He looked towards the entrance of camp where the cats he listed were starting to gather. "We're patrolling the AshClan border." Flowerpaw nodded along and followed her mentor over towards the front of camp.

"Are we all ready?" Nightwing asked when Flowerpaw and Owlfoot approached. All the cats nodded in agreement. "Then let's head out." The patrol exited the camp and Flowerpaw walked close by Owlfoot. Leaf-fall was starting to take hold of the forest, days were chillier and leaves slowly fell from the trees in shades of brown and gold.

The patrol walked through the chilly forest as the sun slowly started to fall and the sky became the beautiful pink and red shades of dusk. Flowerpaw enjoyed watching the sun go down, it made the sky look like something out of a dream. Flowerpaw could smell the AshClan border rising up in the distance and the very tips of the pine trees poking up over the trees of SunClan territory.

They approached the AshClan border, but the scent seemed to be stronger than usual. Beside Flowerpaw, Owlfoot tensed. He sniffed

the air and narrowed his eyes. Flowerpaw looked to the other members of the patrol who seemed to have noticed the same scent difference. Nightwing stepped closer to the border, staring into AshClan's territory. "I know there's cats around here, show yourselves."

Flowerpaw took a step back as a large patrol of AshClan warriors stepped out of the trees. In the lead was a large gray tabby she-cat with challenging green eyes. She had several warriors at her sides who all looked threateningly at the SunClan patrol. Nightwing stepped up to the border, holding her head high. "Ivyheart." Nightwing's voice was stern. "May I ask why you've pushed the limits of our border?"

"A command from Goldenstar." Ivyheart mewed, malice flicking in her green eyes. "It's only the beginning of leaf-fall and AshClan is experienced issues with prey. We came her to ask Foxstar to provide us with a section of your territory."

"Goldenstar is a mouse-brain if she thinks that Foxstar will give up any of SunClan's territory." Frostclaw hissed, her green eyes sharp. "All Clans struggle with prey in the colder seasons, we're not giving up our territory and prey for you."

Ivyheart sighed, unsheathing her claws. Flowerpaw tensed, she noticed Owlfoot taking a small step to stand in front of her protectively. "SunClan cats are always so selfish." She twitched her tail. "Another Clan is in need and you turn us away."

"SunClan cats are not selfish." Nightwing mewed, almost in a growl. "I understand that AshClan is struggling but SunClan cannot sacrifice our own future prey for your sakes. We have to look out for our own warriors first."

"So you speak for Foxstar now?" A dark gray tabby growled. "This is why I said we should speak directly to Foxstar and not some random warrior."

"Pardon me, Jayclaw." Nightwing said, her voice cold. "But I have been serving Foxstar longer than you've been a warrior. Just because I'm not leader or deputy doesn't mean anything. Foxstar

respects all of his senior warriors, and you can talk to Foxstar if you want but you won't be stepping a single paw into SunClan territory."

"How can we speak to Foxstar if we can't enter your territory?" Ivyheart tilted her head, narrowing her eyes.

"You could wait here," Alderfang grumbled. "Or wait until the next gathering where Goldenstar could talk to Foxstar herself."

"Speaking of," Flintstripe twitched his tail. "Since Jayclaw so rudely insulted Nightwing by saying she wasn't leader, why isn't Goldenstar here herself? Instead she sends her deputies and a pawful of arrogant warriors."

"That is none of your business." Hissed a black she-cat, lashing her tail. "We simply came here to ask but it looks like you SunClan fox-hearts want to start a fight."

"SunClan wants no such quarrel, Ravenfur." Nightwing dipped her head. "I simply find your request to be absurd and your warriors to be quite rude. No fighting needs to happen here if you'll just turn back and return to your territory."

"I'm not leaving," Ivyheart stepped dangerously close to the territory, Flowerpaw grew increasingly more nervous. "Until I speak to Foxstar, and I'd prefer not to wait."

"Step into my territory and you will face the wrath of my warriors, Ivyheart." Nightwing spat the she-cats name like poison. She held Ivyheart's dangerous green gaze, both she-cats unsheathed their claws.

"Flowerpaw." Owlfoot's whisper in her ear caused her to nearly jump out of her pelt. She looked up at her mentor, meeting his serious green gaze. "If I fight breaks out I want you to run to camp, I do not want you fighting."

"But--" Owlfoot cut her off with a hiss.

"You have no battle training, most of these cats are fully grown. You run towards camp and send help our way. Do not argue with me."

Flowerpaw could feel the seriousness of his tone, she didn't answer, she just swallowed the knot in her throat and nodded.

"Nightwing, you do not want to fight us." Ivyheart warned, inching closer to the border. The tabby she-cat looked over her shoulder at her patrol and gave a nod. In a heartbeat, the AshClan cats were swarming over the border and attacking the SunClan patrol. Frostclaw was taken down by Ravenfur and Alderfang was tackled by a dark gray tom. There were more cats in the AshClan patrol then there was in the SunClan patrol, and they were quickly overtaken. Flowerpaw couldn't hesitate, she had to follow Owlfoot's commands and go back to camp for help. *I can't fight, but I can run.*

Flowerpaw saw a tortoiseshell she-cat running towards her, but the AshClan cat was thrown to the ground by Owlfoot. He looked at her, motioning with his eyes to run. Flowerpaw nodded and quickly turned, running into the forest as fast as she could. It wasn't long before her leg began to hurt, but she ignored it. *My patrol needs me!*

Flowerpaw ran as hard as she possibly could until SunClan's camp came into view, she nearly exploded into it and stumbled when she entered. She kicked up dirt and grass as she came to a stop in camp, her Clanmates looked at her with alarm. "AshClan is attacking Nightwing's patrol at the border." She exclaimed, struggling to catch her breath.

"How many warriors?" Mallownose asked, her and Foxstar quickly running from the SunTree.

"A lot, more than our patrol." Flowerpaw replied, sitting down and resting her painful leg.

"I want all capable warriors to come with me right away, we want to drive out the AshClan patrol." Foxstar called out to the warriors of SunClan. "If we show up with the majority of the Clan they should run off pretty quickly." The SunClan cats quickly gathered and began leaving the camp, Flowerpaw couldn't help but notice that Stormpaw was among them. *Please be safe.*

The other apprentice, Crowpaw, Thornpaw, Tigerpaw, Bramblepaw and Rainpaw all remained as they probably had the same amount of

battle training as she did, which was none. Thornpaw padded over to her with concern in his amber eyes. "Are you okay?"

Flowerpaw nodded. "I'm fine, just worried and my leg hurts." She looked at the leg she had injured and sighed. "I just hope that the patrol will be okay before help arrives." Thornpaw nodded. Flowerpaw heard scuffling from the medicine cat den and looked up to see Feathernose and Honeypaw preparing herbs. *They're getting ready to treat any wounds. I can only hope that no cat will be too injured.*

The moon was almost fully in the sky by the time Flowerpaw heard the patrol returning. She lifted her head from her position resting outside the apprentice den and looked towards the camp entrance. They walked in, Foxstar at the head with Mallownose at his side. "What happened?" Marshpelt questioned from the nursery, her green eyes filled with concern.

"We showed up and Ivyheart called her warriors to retreat." Foxstar replied. "I wish we could've gotten there sooner but no warrior was severely injured." Flowerpaw's eyes scanned the crowd for both Stormpaw and Owlfoot. She spotted her sister walking beside Firetail, both injury free but Stormpaw had excitement bubbling in her blue eyes. Owlfoot was walking close to the two of them, he had blood on his face. It appeared to be coming from a wound near his eye, but it didn't look dangerous and he had a gentle look in his eyes. Flowerpaw sighed with relief. *Thank StarClan every cat is okay.*

The cats who had been in the patrol made their way to the medicine cat den. The worst injury seemed to be on Frostclaw, she had deep looking wound on her side and walked with a heavy limp but she still had a bright, energetic light in her eyes. Flowerpaw felt relieved, but she was slightly annoyed with AshClan. *Why would we give up our own territory for them? We have cats to feed too!* With a snort Flowerpaw turned towards the apprentice den, she just wanted to sleep after experiencing that battle. She curled up in her nest and prayed to StarClan that AshClan would have some sense in the future and that her Clanmates would be safe.

Chapter 7

The stars formed a path, leading Flowerpaw out of camp. The starlight reflected in her eyes and her paws itched to follow the star path. *Where is it taking me?* She questioned, flicking her tail curiously. *Where are they going?* Flowerpaw stepped forward, in the distance she swore she could see the figure of a cat, but she couldn't be sure. "Hello?" She called out, trying to get the cat's attention. "Is someone there? Where am I?"

The figure stopped walking, it looked over its shoulder and Flowerpaw saw bright glowing eyes. She ducked her head slightly. *Why do I feel so weird about this cat?* Flowerpaw stepped forward. "Hello?" She called out once again, starting to feel more anxious. "Are you a StarClan cat?" She questioned, the words felt frozen in the air. She had never seen a StarClan cat before, why would a StarClan cat come visit her; she was just an apprentice.

The cat looked at her for a few long heartbeats. With a nod, the cat turned and ran ahead; vanishing into the shadows. Flowerpaw stepped forward, but felt something pulling her back. *I shouldn't follow.* Flowerpaw thought, feeling slightly disappointed. She turned her head away, trying to forget about the strange cat.

Flowerpaw opened her eyes and found herself back in the apprentice den. Dawn light was barely breaking through the den's opening, shining onto the pelts of her fellow apprentices. It was mostly full with the exception of Thornpaw. *Falconclaw taking him out early again I suppose.* Flowerpaw sighed, she was worried about her friend. *He told me that the cut was from him falling, but...* She closed her eyes. *Something seems off.*

Beside Flowerpaw, Stormpaw shifted in her sleep. Her silver paws twitched and she let out a slight whimper. *Is she having a nightmare?* Flowerpaw leaned down, touching her nose gently to Stormpaw's head. Almost instantly Stormpaw stopped her twitching, she relaxed and let out a small sigh. *I wonder what she was dreaming about.* Flowerpaw looked away from Stormpaw and out of the apprentice

den entrance.

It looked cold, Flowerpaw was grateful to be surrounded by her denmates and not out there in the cold. *I suppose if I'm awake I should do something.* Flowerpaw stood up and carefully crossed over her denmates, when she made it outside the cold nearly took her breath away. She stopped and shivered, her breath billowing out in clouds in front of her. *I guess leaf-bare's finally here.* She thought bitterly. *My first leaf-bare.* Flowerpaw twitched her stinging ears and looked around for something to do.

It was just past dawn and not a lot of SunClan cats were awake yet, just the dawn patrol and a few select warriors. She looked around the camp, spotting Leafwhisker speaking with Firetail outside the warrior den, both she-cats looked quite cold. Flowerpaw looked around for Owlfoot, wondering if her mentor was awake yet. The only other cats she spotted in camp however were Frostclaw and Jayflight who were sharing a piece of prey near the drinking pool.

It had been half a moon since AshClan attacked SunClan on the border and Frostclaw's injury healed without issue. All that remained was a scar down her side that was nearly hidden by her white fur. The only cat that had a scar was Owlfoot who had a small scar above his eye, Flowerpaw was grateful that no other cats had been hurt.

Flowerpaw looked over at the nursery, it was starting to fill up again. Not only were Tallfern and Marshpelt incredibly close to having kits but Rowanfall had recently moved in as well, expecting Alderfang's kits.

SunClan is going to be filled with so many kits. Flowerpaw thought happily. *We'll have more apprentices than we'll know what to do with.* She looked towards the sky, which was covered in pale gray clouds. *I don't think that's a bad thing, though.* Flowerpaw closed her eyes. *That's why Foxstar always says that having apprentices shows that SunClan is strong.* Flowerpaw sat down, huddling up and trying to stay warm while she waited for Owlfoot to wake up.

She waited outside the apprentice for quite a lot longer, Sandpaw and Applepaw woke up before Owlfoot did and Cloudpaw and

Slatepaw woke up shortly after. The sun was starting to rise and the cold was getting slightly better, but it still bit at Flowerpaw's nose and ears. *Please wake up soon, Owlfoot. I want to warm up.* She looked at the warriors den, Firetail and Leafwhisker had moved away and now several more warriors were waking up. She watched as Rockfall, Moonfur and Brightclaw climbed out of the warrior den and began preparing for the day.

Finally, Flowerpaw spotted the brown pelt of Owlfoot. She stood up and approached her mentor to greet him. "Good morning." She dipped her head.

"Good morning, Flowerpaw." Owlfoot dipped his head as well. "You're awake early, have you been up long?"

Flowerpaw shrugged. "Just since dawn." She looked around. "Are we going to be doing any training today?"

Owlfoot nodded, letting out a big yawn as well. "Yeah, we are. I was thinking maybe some battle training. You haven't done much of that yet and you've been an apprentice for half a moon now. We'll head out in just a bit, I'll see if I can't get another apprentice or two to join us."

Flowerpaw nodded excitedly, she had been really wanting to learn more battle training ever since the battle, she wanted to help her Clan fight and not feel so useless. Flowerpaw watched Owlfoot approach Moonfur who had Sunpaw at his side. Flowerpaw felt slightly nervous, she figured that she would be training with one of Nightwing's kits, not a cat who had been an apprentice longer than even Stormpaw.

Moonfur nodded in agreement to something that Owlfoot said and the three cats made their way back over to Flowerpaw. "Moonfur and Sunpaw will be coming training with us." He explained, looking over his shoulder at the two she-cats.

"Shouldn't I be training with apprentices at my own skill level? Like Crowpaw or Rainpaw." She looked at Sunpaw. "She's had a lot more training than I've had."

"It can be good to learn from an older apprentice and Sunpaw is a very skilled fighter. She'll be able to teach you a lot." Owlfoot replied. "Let's go." Owlfoot turned, leading Moonfur, Sunpaw and Flowerpaw outside of camp.

"Don't worry." Sunpaw mewed, slipping in beside Flowerpaw. "I won't go too hard on you." For a moment it felt like Sunpaw was trying to be insulting, but Flowerpaw looked at her and saw genuine kindness in her green eyes. A sense of comfort washed over Flowerpaw, she felt that she would be okay training with Sunpaw. It was better than training with Slatepaw who took everything way too seriously.

The group of cats soon reached the training hollow, and each of them were shivering from the cold. "Leaf-bare certainly isn't wasting any time now that it's actually here." Moonfur mewed, looking around at the frost covered forest. "It won't be long before prey become an issue."

"We should have enough for a while." Owlfoot assured her. "Foxstar made sure to have the hunting patrols get as much as possible." He rested his green eyes on the two apprentices. "But fighting should warm us up, let's get started." He faced Flowerpaw. "We're going to start with some simple battle moves." Owlfoot looked over Sunpaw and Flowerpaw. "Every second matters when you're fighting an enemy, and any second could be your last if your not careful." Owlfoot flicked his tail. "If you're fighting and you expose your belly to the enemy then they can easily injure you and take control of the fight. However, if you can get them to expose their belly then you can take control of the fight. Sunpaw, what are some ways that you can do that."

Sunpaw lifted her head. "If you're fighting and you pin them on your back then you can easily attack their belly, however you have to be careful because they will be able to get yours at the same time. You have to be fast."

"Good." Owlfoot mewed while Moonfur nodded approvingly at her apprentice. "Speed is also important, you have to be faster than your enemy or they will take you out. Sometimes that's hard, like when you're against a MoonClan cat. However, they may run fast

but as long as you attack faster you can win."

Flowerpaw nodded along with what Owlfoot was saying, trying to understand and remember as much as possible. *What if I'm not fast enough? Or what if I hurt my leg again, what happens then?* She tried to swallow her anxieties and fears about fighting, she didn't want to be a useless warrior.

"I want the two of you try and get at each other's bellies." He instructed. "Don't be too rough though, and keep your claws sheathed." Flowerpaw looked at Sunpaw, she had much more training than she did. *How will I ever be able to win against her?* Nevertheless, Flowerpaw crouched and prepared to fight.

Sunpaw crouched into a fighting stance, which seemed a lot more stable than Flowerpaw's, she quickly tried to mimic the golden apprentice. "Now!" Owlfoot commanded and Sunpaw ran forward, faster than Flowerpaw had time to react. Sunpaw knocked her to the ground, causing her to land on her back with a yelp. Sunpaw went to attack Flowerpaw's belly. *I can't lose this early!* Flowerpaw covered her belly with her paws and flipped herself over, Sunpaw's paws uselessly hit her back.

Flowerpaw squirmed out of Sunpaw's grip and whirrled on her, trying to knock her over in the same way. Flowerpaw jumped forward, her paws pushing into Sunpaw's shoulder and knocking her onto her back. Pride washed through her body. *I did it!*

Flowerpaw felt pain hit her belly and she fell backwards off of Sunpaw. She landed awkwardly on her shoulder and lifted her head in surprise. Sunpaw held her head high with pride and Owlfoot shook his head slightly. "You forgot what I said." He mewed. "Your belly is just as exposed when you pin someone down, Sunpaw got you first." Flowerpaw dropped her head. *How could I be such a mouse-brain!* She scolded herself. *He just told me that, and I forgot.*

"Don't be so hard on yourself, Flowerpaw." Owlfoot's tone softened. "This is only your first fight against another opponent, and it's easy to forget the important details in the heat of battle." Flowerpaw lowered her head, still feeling bad about letting herself lose like that. "That's part of learning, as you train more you will become

more focused in battle. You have to remember you've only been an apprentice for half a moon, you won't be as skilled as Sunpaw just yet."

His words made Flowerpaw feel slightly better, but there was still a gnawing feeling at Flowerpaw's heart. *I should've been an apprentice for much longer.* She stared down at her paws.

"Moonfur, Sunpaw." Owlfoot looked at the two she-cats. "Will you give us a moment? I'm going to talk to Flowerpaw." Flowerpaw looked up, her pelt burning with embarrassment. *What's he going to talk to me about? And why did he have to say it in front of those two.*

"Of course," Moonfur stood up, looking down at Sunpaw. "Let's see if we can't catch some prey."

"Okay!" Sunpaw cheerfully followed Moonfur away from the training area, her tail twitching with happiness. Flowerpaw looked at the floor, trying to ignore Owlfoot's gaze. She heard his pawsteps and felt him sit beside her, his gaze burning into her.

"You can't punish yourself so hard for simple mistakes, Flowerpaw." He mewed, his voice soft. Flowerpaw still avoided his gaze. "Every warrior makes them, and this was just training. I guarantee that every single warrior in this forest, myself included have made those mistakes. I've seen Foxstar fall flat on his face while training. I've seen your father trip on his own tail into a puddle of mud."

The image of Stonewhisker, the big, brave warrior that Flowerpaw had painted in her mind; tripping over his own tail lit up Flowerpaw's mind. She couldn't help but laugh at the thought. Beside her, Owlfoot let out a warm chuckle. "See, what did I tell you?" Owlfoot nudged her playfully. "You'll make mistakes, but you can't torture yourself for making them; you have to learn from them. The best warriors accept their mistakes, they laugh at them and they learn from them. That's how they become the best warriors."

Flowerpaw felt Owlfoot's words reach her, she thought about them over and over. *That's how they become the best warriors.* Flowerpaw couldn't fault herself for making mistakes, every warrior did. "Do

you understand?" Owlfoot questioned.

Flowerpaw looked up, finally meeting his gaze. "I do, thank you, Owlfoot." She purred, suddenly grateful that Owlfoot had been made her mentor. He was a kind, understanding and respectful cat, she couldn't ask for a better mentor.

Flowerpaw and Owlfoot met up with Sunpaw and Moonfur and decided to return to camp to warm up for a bit. Flowerpaw enjoyed the walk through the forest, and she felt better about losing the fight against Sunpaw. *I'll just have to try harder next time.* She told her, feeling her spirits lift. Even with the cold, Flowerpaw had a slight skip in her step.

When they returned to camp, Flowerpaw noticed that Foxstar was standing with Crowpaw, Thornpaw and Stormpaw. They all looked excited and interested in something that Foxstar was saying. Stormpaw looked over her shoulder when Flowerpaw entered camp and nearly jumped up with excitement. "Flowerpaw!"

"What's going on?" She questioned, looking at Owlfoot who looked just as confused.

"We're all going to the moonstone!"

Chapter 8

"The moonstone?" Flowerpaw echoed tilting her head in confusion. She looked at Foxstar and the group of apprentices, each of them looked excited. "Why are we going to the moonstone?"

"Every apprentice goes to the moonstone at some point during their apprenticeship, and now it's your turn to go." Foxstar explained. "Normally I like to take apprentices who all started their training together, but I feel like seven apprentices would be quite the hassle. Tigerpaw, Rainpaw and Bramblepaw will go next time. To make them feel better i told them they could go to the next gathering."

Crowpaw twitched her ears. "So does that mean we *can't* go to the gathering?" Disappointment heavily lined her mew.

"I"m sorry Crowpaw, but with the amount of apprentices we have it's hard to take all of them at once. You'll get to go to the next one; plus." Foxstar's green eyes rested on Thornpaw. "This one isn't allowed to go to the gathering anyway." Thornpaw snorted and looked away, his fur puffing out slightly. Flowerpaw withheld laughter, and turned back to Foxstar. "All of you need to go to Feathernose and Honeypaw to get some travelling herbs, we'll leave once you all do that. Meet back up here when you're finished."

"Let's go!" Stormpaw pushed Flowerpaw forward, nearly causing her to stumble over her front paws. Behind them, Crowpaw and Thornpaw followed, Crowpaw looked excited but Thornpaw still looked annoyed. *Is he really that upset about what Foxstar said?* Flowerpaw wondered. *It's your own fault that you ran off that night.* Flowerpaw ran ahead of Stormpaw so she would stop being shoved and made their way to the medicine cat den.

Flowerpaw stepped inside and was surprised to see Firetail talking with Feathernose. "So I should be okay?" Firetail asked, her voice sounded slightly uncertain.

"Yes, Firetail. Just eat this tansy and come back to me if it persists."

Feathernose pushed a yellow flower towards the ginger warrior. "You were smart to come to me now." *Is Firetail sick?*

"Firetail?" Stormpaw stepped forward, her voice trembling slightly. "Is everything okay?" She looked at her mentor with great concern in her blue eyes. Firetail turned to look at Stormpaw and let out a purr.

"Yes, Stormpaw, I'm alright. Just a small cough, but Feathernose helped me out. I hear you're going to the moonstone?" She questioned, looking over the apprentices with interest.

Stormpaw nodded. "We came here to get some travelling herbs." Stormpaw replied, Flowerpaw could tell that she was still uncertain. *I hope that Firetail really is okay.* Flowerpaw thought with worry. *I don't want Stormpaw to lose her mentor, I can tell they're close.* Flowerpaw wondered what would happen if she lost Owlfoot. *He's not family, but he's been a great mentor to me. Especially today.*

"That sounds wonderful." Firetail brushed her tail against Stormpaw's flank. "Travel safe and tell me all about it when you get back." The ginger she-cat left the medicine cat den, Stormpaw looked after her with concern written all over her face.

"Don't worry about her, Stormpaw." Feathernose said in a reassuring tone. "Even if her cough does get worse I have the means to treat her." His tone was gentle and calming, it seemed to help Stormpaw. She lifted her head and her eyes lit up. "Now, for your herbs." Feathernose turned to face Honeypaw who was gathering four bundles of herbs. "Take these and they'll help you travel."

Feathernose gave a bundle to Crowpaw, Thornpaw and Stormpaw but stopped when he reached Flowerpaw. "As for you, I've added a little something extra to your herbs. There's comfrey root in there to help with any pain you might deal with while travelling." He pushed the herbs towards Flowerpaw. "If the pain gets too bad don't hesitate to ask Foxstar to stop and let you rest, you don't want to injure yourself."

Flowerpaw nodded, feeling slightly awkward but ate her herbs anyway. She noticed her fellow apprentices making faces as they

ate the bitter herbs. Flowerpaw was used to the taste of herbs, even in the time that she had been out the taste of herbs didn't bother her. Flowerpaw swallowed her herbs and looked to her friends.

"Are we ready to go?" Crowpaw questioned the others, they nodded and the four apprentices left the medicine cat den, Flowerpaw glanced over at Stormpaw. Her blue eyes were troubled, was she still concerned about Firetail? Flowerpaw hoped that once they set out for the moonstone that she would feel better about going.

The apprentices approached the SunTree where Foxstar sat with Mallownose. "Are you all ready to go?" The leader questioned, twitching his whiskers. "Mallownose will be joining us." The four apprentices nodded and began following their leader out of camp. The moment they stepped into the forest, excitement buzzed in Flowerpaw's heart. She was finally going to see beyond the territory, even if she didn't get to go to the gathering she felt that this more than made up for it.

"Where is the moonstone, anyway?" Crowpaw questioned as they made their way deeper into the forest.

"It's past MoonClan territory." Foxstar replied. "We'll cross the river and then walk through MoonClan's territory and soon we'll reach the Spirit Woods." He looked over his shoulder at the apprentices. "It's quite the walk but we'll be there before you know it."

"I thought we weren't allowed into another Clan's territory." Thornpaw pointed out, flicking his tail. "Isn't that against the warrior code."

"We have an agreement with MoonClan." Mallownose replied. "As long as we stick close to the river and don't take any prey we're allowed to cross when going to the moonstone." She purred. "Don't worry about breaking any rules, we'll be fine. Feathernose and Honeypaw do this every half-moon."

"Are we supposed to swim across?" Stormpaw inquired, sounding uncomfortable. Flowerpaw wondered the same thing, she had no intentions of swimming across the river.

"Only if you really want to." Foxstar let out a *mrrow* of laughter. "There's a way to cross, you'll see it when you get there." The apprentices stopped asking questions and continued their journey. Flowerpaw looked around SunClan territory as they neared the MoonClan border, she had seen the border before but didn't spend much time around there. Most of the Clan liked to hunt in the center of the territory or closer to the AshClan border because that's where most of the prey was.

In the distance, Flowerpaw could hear the sounds of the rushing river. It sounded like it was louder than usual with made Flowerpaw incredibly uneasy. She wasn't sure how they were going to cross the river but she wasn't looking forward to it. *I don't like being over water.* She shuddered at the thought.

Through the trees Flowerpaw saw the sparkling surface of the river as it rushed past them. The patrol broke through the trees and stood at the bank of the river. It was full and moving quite fast, Flowerpaw tensed as she watched it move. "Over here is where we cross." Foxstar trotted up to the river and motioned to an incredibly large branch. "It may look dangerous but we've been crossing it for as long as I can remember. Fishtail crossed this branch when she first came to the moonstone." He placed his paw on it, it looked sturdy but Flowerpaw still didn't trust it.

"I'll cross first." Foxstar stepped onto the branch and walked carefully across until he reached MoonClan territory. "Mallownose, why don't you help them cross and then you follow behind."

Mallownose nodded. "Crowpaw why don't you cross first." She suggested. The black she-cat nodded, though Flowerpaw could see a hint of doubt and fear in her amber eyes. Crowpaw approached the branch, set one paw on it gingerly, then slowly crossed. When she reached the other side, she looked across the river with excitement in her eyes.

"It's not that bad." She assured her friends, looking up at Foxstar for a moment then back across the river.

"Thornpaw, you next." The pale tabby stepped forward and onto the branch with ease. He didn't seem to have the slightest bit of concern

or fear. Once across he stood next to Crowpaw and waited patiently.

"Alright, Flowerpaw." Flowerpaw tensed as Mallownose instructed her to go forward, despite Crowpaw's assurance and Thornpaw's confidence, she still didn't trust the branch. *What if I slip? Or what if my leg suddenly gives out?* Flowerpaw took a deep breath and forced herself to go forward.

She looked at the branch and took another deep, yet shaky breath. She placed one paw on the branch and instantly felt the river splashing at her paws. Her stomach twisted in knots but Flowerpaw pushed herself forward. She had all four paws on the branch and the only image she could form in her mind was falling into the freezing water down below.

Flowerpaw forced her paws to move forward, slowly crossing the branch. When she finally felt her paws touch solid ground, she nearly ran forward. As she stepped off, Flowerpaw stumbled forward and let out a cry of alarm. She thought she was falling into the river and she dashed forward, trying to save herself.

She nearly fell onto the ground but Thornpaw rushed to her side and steadied her. "You're okay." He said, his voice soft and calming. "You made it." Flowerpaw's pelt burned and she stood up on her own, nodding her head thankfully towards Thornpaw. *Well that was embarrassing.*

Thornpaw and Flowerpaw sat beside Crowpaw, Flowerpaw's pelt still burning from her clumsy entrance to the other side. *At least no MoonClan cats saw me, they would think that SunClan apprentices were mouse-brains!* Flowerpaw looked across the river as Stormpaw began to cross.

Stormpaw looked incredibly nervous, but moved faster than Flowerpaw did. She reached the other side and held her head up high. Flowerpaw greeted her sister, grateful that she had crossed safely. The only cat the remaind was Mallownose who crossed with as much ease as Thornpaw.

"Good job, all of you." Foxstar praised with a gentle light in his

green eyes. "Now we can continue." The ginger leader turned and began leading his patrol across the river.

Behind them, Flowerpaw heard the shuffling of leaves and brush. She tensed and turned to see a MoonClan patrol. At the lead was a white and gray she-cat with pretty blue eyes. Behind her was a silver tabby she-cat, a black tom with amber eyes, a brown tabby and a smaller black tom who Flowerpaw assumed was an apprentice.

Foxstar turned to face the MoonClan patrol, stepping in front of the apprentices. Mallownose stood beside him. "Greetings, Cloudwind." Foxstar dipped his head respectfully.

"Foxstar, Mallownose." Cloudwind nodded to the SunClan leader and deputy in turn. "What bring you to MoonClan territory."

"We're taking some of our newest apprentices to the moonstone today." Foxstar explained.

"Wonderful." Cloudwind purred. "Are these Hawktalon's kits? I heard Nightwing had quite the big litter." She looked past Foxstar and Mallownose at the SunClan apprentice.

"Two of them are." Foxstar looked over at the apprentice. "Crowpaw and Thornpaw are, the other two are Stonewhisker's daughters; Stormpaw and Flowerpaw." Flowerpaw couldn't help but notice that the silver tabby she-cat had an incredibly sad look in her green eyes, she looked at her paws. *I wonder what's wrong with her?* Flowerpaw turned away. *Whatever it is, I hope she's okay.*

"It's nice to meet you all." Cloudwind dipped her head. "I'll let you be on your way, have safe travels and may StarClan light your path."

"Yours as well." Foxstar dipped his head in return and lead the SunClan cats farther up the river.

"Berryfrost told me that Stonewhisker is the cat that is mates with the kittypet." Flowerpaw's ears pricked up, she whipped around to look at who had said that. She saw the smaller black apprentice

looking up at the brown tabby. "Are those two half-kittypet?"

"That's hardly your business to gossip about, Breezepaw." The silver tabby replied, her voice sharp. "It doesn't matter if their mother is a kittypet or not."

Flowerpaw felt a sharp edge of anger clawing at her. She knew that Dovewish was a kittypet until she met Stonewhisker and she was welcomed into the Clan, but she didn't think it made her or Stormpaw any less of warriors. *Who cares if Dovewish was a kittypet, she's not a kittypet and that's what counts*! Flowerpaw let out a low grumbled, turning her head away from the arrogant MoonClan apprentice. *He better hopes I never meet him in battle, I'll show him what a half-kittypet can do.* She flexed her claws, tearing at the semi-frozen ground.

"You alright?" Flowerpaw heard Thornpaw's voice which pulled her out of her blind annoyance. His amber eyes were lined with concern.

"Yeah, I'm fine." She replied, half-mumbling. Thornpaw didn't look convinced but he didn't press any further. Instead, he nudged her playfully and said:

"Aren't you excited to see the moonstone?" He questioned, sparks flickering in his eyes. "I know I am."

"I am." Flowerpaw purred, pushing what Breezepaw into the back of her mind. *I have better things going on. I can't let what some dense apprentice thinks bug me.* "I wonder if all of us actually to get see it or how that's going to work."

Thornpaw shrugged. "I hope we all get to see it, but I don't know how big that cavern is. I guess we'll have to see." Flowerpaw nodded and began looking around MoonClan territory. The trees had started to thin out and all she could really see was vast moorland. *How can MoonClan like this?* She wondered. *I couldn't stand not having the trees above my head.* She suddenly missed her own territory, where she was sheltered from the trees. Out here on the moorland the cold wind bit even harder, Flowerpaw soon found herself shivering and the old injury in her leg was starting to

become sore. The sun was also starting to fall, and they would no longer have the heat of the sun.

I hope we're almost there. Flowerpaw prayed silently. *I wouldn't want to have to stop everyone just because my leg hurts.* She bit back the pain and followed her Clanmates, hoping that her limp wouldn't show too much.

In the distance Flowerpaw could see odd trees rising up in the distance. They were tall and white. They seemed to glow in the moonlight, but before they reached the trees there was a stream in their path. "Ahead of us is the Spirit Woods." Foxstar explained. "In the heart of the Spirit Woods is the Spirit Tree which houses the moonstone." He looked at the apprentices. "We have to cross a stream, but it's not very difficult. It's small enough to jump over."

"Will you be okay to jump?" Thornpaw questioned Flowerpaw quietly. "I noticed you were starting to limp a bit."

Flowerpaw nodded. "Yes, I'll be fine." Flowerpaw replied, though Thornpaw didn't seem to believe her. *I don't know if I believe me.* Flowerpaw thought, but shook her head. *I can do this.* She told herself and faced the river head on. Foxstar jumped with ease, and it didn't look like he had to put much effort into his leap.

Crowpaw and Stormpaw did the same thing, crossing with ease. Flowerpaw looked to Thornpaw, expecting him to go next but he motioned with his head for her to cross first. Flowerpaw twitched her ears with slightly annoyance, but approached the stream anyway. She looked at it, and found that it really wasn't that bag. *I got this.* Flowerpaw assured herself and gave a hearty leap.

She landed somewhat awkwardly, but didn't feel that much pain in her leg. She stood up straight and looked across where Thornpaw was already preparing to jump, and Mallownose soon followed.

"Good job. We're almost there." Foxstar looked towards the sky as the moon slowly began to rise. Foxstar continued padding forward while the apprentices and Mallownose followed. As the moon took to the sky, the trees began to glow, casting an eerie shadow throughout the forest.

They walked through the Spirit Woods and Flowerpaw swore she could hear whispers around her, and cats brushing up against her pelt. She suppressed a shiver and ducked her head. Around her, the other apprentices seemed to be experiencing the same thing, even Thornpaw. Mallownose and Foxstar, however, looked just fine. *I suppose they've been here before.* Still, Flowerpaw couldn't see herself growing use to the strange forest.

Flowerpaw noticed something growing up in the distance, it was incredibly beg and towered over the rest of the trees. As they grew closer, Flowerpaw could see that it was the same type of tree as the others, but this one's roots twisted away; opening a huge gaping hole into the ground.

"There it is." Foxstar mewed, looking up at the sky once more. "Right on time, as well." Flowerpaw looked up, it was just before moonhigh. Foxstar turned to the apprentices. "When a group of apprentices come here, the leader chooses one apprentice to join them into the Spirit Tree. This apprentice is chosen based off how they've acted as apprentices. Not only their skills with fighting or hunting, but their spirit and attitude as an apprentice." Foxstar looked over the apprentices. *I wonder who he's going to pick.*

"The apprentice I chose is Thornpaw." Beside Flowerpaw, Thornpaw's jaw dropped and his amber eyes went wide.

"Me?" He said, sounding genuinely shocked. "But I thought I was still technically being punished for running away to the gathering."

Foxstar let out a purr of amusement. "You are, but since you've become an apprentice you've showed such spirit and dedication to becoming a warrior. I know part of that is Falconclaw's influence but I know that part of it is your own heart. I want you to join me, Thornpaw. I believe that you have the most to learn from this experience."

Thornpaw looked at the other apprentices, he looked shocked; as if he were trying to figure out if this was real or not. Flowerpaw was slightly disappointed that she wouldn't be able to see the moonstone, but she was incredibly happy for Thornpaw. "Go head." She said, urging him. Thornpaw closed his shocked jaw and

nodded, he turned to Foxstar and joined his side.

"The rest of you will wait out here with Mallownose, we will return shortly." Flowerpaw watched as Thornpaw and Foxstar approached the cavern and soon were devoured by the darkness.

"What do we do now?" Stormpaw questioned, looking at Mallownose expectantly. "How long will they be?"

"It's hard to say." Mallownose looked at the apprentices. "Follow me." The pale gray she-cat led the remaining apprentices a few fox lengths away to a small tree den. "We normally wait here until they're done. You can sleep if you want, it could be a while."

The three apprentices each curled up, rather close together to stay warm while Mallownose sat watch just outside the den. Flowerpaw wondered what the moonstone looked like, or if Thornpaw would talk to a StarClan cat while he was down there. *I'm happy for you, Thornpaw...*Flowerpaw thought as she drifted off into sleep.

The stars above Flowerpaw's head were swirling, it was a shocking, yet beautiful sight. She stared with awe, wondering what they would do. Movement caught Flowerpaw's eyes, she looked ahead of her see to several cats. They had stars swirling in their pelts and shimmering eyes. *StarClan cats!* Flowerpaw realized with joy. One of them was a beautiful silver she-cat with almost pure white fur, she was sitting close to a large golden tom with shocking green eyes.

None of them seemed to notice Flowerpaw, they were just talking and sharing tongues. *They're just like a normal Clan.* Flowerpaw watched them closely. There was a brown tabby tom sitting close with a lethe brown she-cat, they looked into each other's eyes lovingly. Flowerpaw felt warmth spread through her body. *StarClan cats are just like us...*Flowerpaw thought, she didn't know why she was seeing this, but she was glad that she did.

A familiar voice woke up Flowerpaw, she lifted her head expecting to find herself in the apprentice den, but soon remembered that she had traveled to the moonstone. Beside her, Crowpaw and Stormpaw were sitting up and looking out the entrance to the tree den they

had stayed in.

"How did it go, Foxstar?" Mallownose questioned. Flowerpaw peered around Mallownose and the two apprentices to see that Foxstar and Thornpaw had returned. There was something off about Thornpaw, his amber eyes were wide and filled with an odd sense of wonder. *What did he see?* Flowerpaw wondered, but now didn't seem like the time to ask.

"It went well." Foxstar nodded. "But I would like to get back to camp, we should head back." Mallownose agreed and the SunClan cats began their long journey home. Flowerpaw looked at Thornpaw as they began leaving the Spirit Woods. He looked troubled. *Is he okay?* Flowerpaw questioned, concerned for her friend. She didn't ask though, Flowerpaw looked ahead as the moon was starting to slowly fall from the sky. *He'll tell me when wants to.* Despite her own thoughts, Flowerpaw couldn't help but wonder but Thornpaw had seen.

Chapter 9

"Are they here yet?" Rainpaw questioned, the black she-cat was walking around in circles.

"Not yet." Stonewhisker purred. "Kitting takes time."

"But Marshpelt has been kitting since dawn!" Rainpaw complained, twitching her white ears impatiently. "It didn't take Tallfern long at all to have Snakekit."

"Every queen is different." Stonewhisker flicked his tail over Rainpaw's tail. "Plus, Tallfern only had one kit. Marshpelt is probably having more than one."

"Why do you care so much anyway?" Bramblepaw questioned, taking a bit of the mouse he was sharing with Tigerpaw.

"Because," Rainpaw stuck her nose in the air. "Kits are always fun, and the nursery has been empty of kits since we became apprentices."

"Oh wow," Thornpaw teased, smoothing down a piece of fur on his chest. "A whole two moons."

Rainpaw hissed. "Well you may not be excited, but I am." She sat down and looked away from her brothers.

"New kits are always a good sign." Stonewhisker added. "Especially in leaf-bare." Flowerpaw looked up at her father, she couldn't help but agree. Leaf-bare was in full swing, the forest was frozen over and covered in snow. Flowerpaw for one, hated the cold, but at least kits were a good sign.

"I thought it was dangerous to have kits in leaf-bare?" Stormpaw questioned, looking up at Stonewhisker.

"It can be." Stonewhisker replied, looking towards the nursery. "But we have two wonderful medicine cats here to make sure that the

kits are healthy." Stormpaw nodded and looked at the nursery as well. Every few moments, Flowerpaw would hear Marshpelt letting out a cry of pain. Foxstar was pacing outside the nursery, waiting for his kits to arrive.

Flowerpaw shivered, pressing close against her sister for warmth. They had spent the day trying to find more prey, which wasn't easy since the forest was covered in snow. The cold also aggravated her old injury, which Tigerpaw and Bramblepaw teased her for by saying she sounded like an elder.

Flowerpaw ignored their taunts, knowing that they were only teasing. She was incredibly close to all of them that she knew they didn't mean any harm. She turned her focus to the nursery when Honeypaw poked her head out and Foxstar stepped inside after her.

"Are they here?" Rainpaw questioned, sounding suddenly excited. She jumped to her paws, blue eyes glowing.

"That's normally a sign that they are." Stonewhisker looked towards the nursery. "We'll just have to wait." The apprentices did wait, and Flowerpaw couldn't help but notice that even Tigerpaw, Thornpaw and Bramblepaw looked excited. Flowerpaw felt excitement herself, it was very exciting when Snakekit was born. He was the only kit born to Tallfern and Flintstripe, but he was born quite big.

After what seemed like forever, Foxstar stepped out of the nursery and held his head high. "Cats of SunClan, I am proud to welcome my two sons into the Clan; Barkkit and Rustkit!" The cats of SunClan let out cheers, welcoming the two new cats into SunClan. Flowerpaw felt warmth despite the cold, she was very excited to have to new cats in the Clan. Not to mention, Rowanfall was only a moon away from having her own kits.

The cheering came to an eerie stop when one of the SunClan warriors broke out in coughing. The entirety of the Clan looked towards the warrior's den where Fernsong was sitting beside Briarheart. The golden brown she-cat's body shook as she coughed heavily. Bramblepaw tensed and stared at his mentor with worry.

"Fernsong?" Briarheart questioned, his voice filled with worry. "Are

you okay?" From the nursery, Feathernose swiftly moved to Fernsong with Honeypaw following closely behind him. The Clan watched intensely while the medicine cats looked over Fernsong. After a few moments, the she-cat followed Feathernose and Honeypaw into the medicine cat den.

"Is she sick?" Bramblepaw questioned, his voice trembling.

"I can't tell you, Bramblepaw." Stonewhisker looked at the apprentice with sadness in his green eyes. "We'll just have to wait and see, but she's in capable paws with Feathernose and Honeypaw."

"What if she gets greencough?" Bramblepaw questioned, his green eyes were on the verge of panic. "Will she die?"

"Bramblepaw." Stonewhisker's voice grew stern, Flowerpaw hadn't seen her father speak like that before. "You can't think like that, even if she does have greencough it doesn't always mean death. Do not let it distract you or scare you." Bramblepaw's green eyes looked incredibly troubled, but he dropped his head and looked at his paws.

Stonewhisker stood up and touched his nose to Flowerpaw's and Stormpaw's head. "I'm going to go on patrol, stay warm." He looked towards Rainpaw. "You want to join?" Rainpaw jumped up and nodded. Stonewhisker gave one last nod at his daughters before padding with Rainpaw over to Mallownose was was setting up a patrol.

"I'm sure Fernsong will be okay." Tigerpaw was talking to Bramblepaw while Thornpaw nodded along. "You have nothing to worry about." Bramblepaw looked up at his brother's gratefully, but Flowerpaw could see that he wasn't totally convinced. Flowerpaw glanced over at Stormpaw, she had dealt with similar fears when she thought that Firetail might be sick, but it had a half-moon since then and Firetail didn't seem to be any sicker.

"Thornpaw." Flowerpaw jumped at Falconclaw's sharp voice. The large tabby was looking at Thornpaw with narrowed amber eyes. "We're going hunting." Thornpaw stood up and began walking over

to his mentor. Flowerpaw caught Owlfoot out of the corner of her eyes who was rushing up to Falconclaw.

"Falconclaw," He mewed. "Mind if Flowerpaw and I join you?" Flowerpaw perked her eyes up. Falconclaw looked at Flowerpaw with a gaze that made her feel incredibly uncomfortable.

Falconclaw hesitated, but turned away for a moment with a sharp sigh. "I suppose. Let's go." He didn't waste any time, turning and heading for camp's entrance. Flowerpaw quickly got to her paws and ran up to Owlfoot, Falconclaw and Thornpaw. She didn't even have a chance to say goodbye to her sister before she was following the group into the cold forest.

The patrol reached the forest rather quickly, she was surprised at the pace that Falconclaw used when walking to the forest, it was almost a run and Thornpaw kept up with ease. *I suppose he is his apprentice.* Flowerpaw didn't like it though, her leg was already sore enough with the cold weather.

Falconclaw stopped when they reached a cluster trees. "Since you're both hunting, I want both of you to go out hunting and not come back until you've caught at least two more pieces of prey each." Owlfoot looked somewhat uneasy at Falconclaw taking charge like that, but he nodded along. Flowerpaw looked at Thornpaw, she hadn't been able to train with him at all in almost two moons that they had been apprentices, she was glad she was finally able to.

Flowerpaw followed Thornpaw as they moved into the snowy forest, leaving Falconclaw and Owlfoot behind. Thornpaw's amber eyes were focused and determined as he moved through the forest, he sniffed the air. Flowerpaw did the same, but only caught scent of frost which burned her nose.

Thornpaw suddenly veered away from Flowerpaw, he had clearly caught the scent of prey and turned to follow it. Flowerpaw quickly followed behind him, dropping into a crouch and making sure not to scare off his prey. She spotted his pale pelt a few taillengths ahead, he had come to a stop and flattened himself to the ground. Flowerpaw watched him hunt, his form looked a lot neater than Flowerpaw's. His body was relaxed and focused, he moved like

lightning as he rushed forward to kill his prey.

"Great catch." Flowerpaw purred. Thornpaw turned around with a mouse in his jaws, looking slightly surprised. He set it down and looked at her with curiosity in his eyes.

"Thanks." He replied, sounding somewhat awkward.

"Falconclaw must be a great mentor," Flowerpaw mewed. "Your hunting skills are much better than mine."

Thornpaw seemed to stiffen slightly, but his body relaxed and he shrugged. "I'm sure your skills are just fine." He looked at Flowerpaw with gentle eyes. "Falconclaw is just a strict mentor." Something faltered in the amber depths, but Flowerpaw couldn't tell what it was. He turned away, hiding his gaze from Flowerpaw. "Let's keep hunting. Falconclaw doesn't like to be kept waiting."

Flowerpaw felt slightly unnerved by the sentence, but brushed it away with a shiver. Thornpaw was right, they needed to keep hunting. They walked together, searching for more prey. Flowerpaw finally caught the scent of mouse and dropped into a crouch, looking for the creature.

She spotted the mouse's pale brown pelt among the snow as it sniffed for food. Flowerpaw crept forward, trying to keep her steps silent as Owlfoot taught her. The mouse didn't notice her, it was completely oblivious to her. *This is perfect.* Flowerpaw licked her lips and crept forward.

She moved quickly, getting ready to kill it but pain shot through her forepaw as she caught it on a root that stuck out of the ground, hidden under the snow. She stumbled head over tail and landed in a snow bank, shivering despite the intense burn of embarrassment. Her paw was sore and she sat up, shaking snow from her gray fur.

She noticed Thornpaw running up to her, looking concerned. "Are you okay?" He questioned, looking her over.

"Yeah." She flattened her ears, feeling like a kit who was fresh out of the nursery. She wished hadn't done that in front of Thornpaw.

"Just tripped." *I'm such a mouse-brain!* She scolded herself, avoiding Thornpaw's gaze.

"Don't beat yourself up." Thornpaw nudged her, helping her to stand. "It happens." She met his gaze and found his amber eyes to be as soft as honey. "It's hard hunting in the snow." He brushed the snow on the root away with his tail. "You just have to be extra alert. When you're about to catch something you want to take in your surroundings, looking for anything that could trip you up."

Flowerpaw looked at Thornpaw, surprised at how confident he sounded. He sounded like a mentor, a full grown warrior. Her pelt still burned, she looked towards where the mouse rain away. "I still lost the mouse."

"And next time you won't." Thornpaw's voice brought a hint of confidence to her mood, she lifted her head. "Come on, let's go find you another mouse." Flowerpaw blinked, following Thornpaw as he padded in the direction that the mouse ran off to. "See this?" He pointed with his paw to tiny paw prints in the snow. "If we're lucky, we can find the mouse again. Keep your nose peeled."

Flowerpaw sniffed the air, trying to ignore the scent of frost and sure enough she caught the scent of mouse again. Thornpaw stopped her mid-walk. "Over there." He whispered and flicked his tail towards the roots of a tree where a mouse sat, digging at the ground. "It's going to be more alert now but you can do it." Thornpaw quietly stepped back. Flowerpaw dropped into a crouch, feeling Thornpaw's gaze on her back. She didn't feel like there was more pressure, she actually felt more comfortable.

Flowerpaw looked around, taking note of anything that could cause her to trip again. She spotted a rock that jutted out of the crowd and positioned herself to avoid it. She focused her pale green eyes on the mouse, creeping forward silently. She closed her eyes, taking a moment to focus before she darted forward.

Her paws hit the mouse directly and she bit into its neck, killing it quickly. The warmth of it's body filled her with exhilaration. She sat up with excitement and looked at Thornpaw who looked equally as excited. "Great job." He purred.

"Thanks." Flowerpaw ducked her head, setting the mouse down. "I couldn't have done it without your help."

"Of course you could've." Thornpaw brushed his tail against her side. "Everything you do is something you're capable of with or without help." Flowerpaw blinked, surprised at the wisdom behind his words. "Now come on," He nudged her forward. "We have more prey catch!"

After hunting for quite a while, Thornpaw managed to catch a squirrel and Flowerpaw caught another mouse. However, they had been hunting for quite a while and both apprentices were incredibly cold.

"Let's get our prey and head back before we freeze to death." Thornpaw chuckled and began heading for where they left Owlfoot and Falonclcaw. They ran close together, trying to stay warm while holding onto their prey.

Suddenly, Thornpaw tripped and fell forward. Flowerpaw tried stopping but her paws slipped and stumbled over her own paw and slammed into Thornpaw. The two apprentices fell down a slope in a flurry of snow. Then they stopped rolling, Flowerpaw was lying on top of Thornpaw and both apprentices were laughing loudly.

Flowerpaw was happy, she hadn't this much fun hunting before. *I guess this is what's its like hunting with friends.* She looked at Thornpaw who looked equally as happy. *He seemed so stern when we started, I'm glad he's laughing now.*

"What's going on?" A sharp voice cut through the air, silencing their laughter. Thornpaw suddenly began scrambling to his paws, knocking Flowerpaw off and into the snow. She poked her head up in confusion as he looking for the piece of prey that they had dropped. She looked towards where the voice came from and saw Falconclaw and Owlfoot looking down at them, Falconclaw had rage burning deep in his amber eyes that made Flowerpaw feel incredibly uneasy. "I'm pretty sure you two are supposed to be hunting, not playing in the snow."

"We weren't playing." Thornpaw quickly mewed, picking up his

squirrel. "We were bringing our prey back when we fell."

Falconclaw narrowed his eyes, but Flowerpaw noticed that they were primarily resting on her. She stood up, shaking snow from her pelt. "That's right." She added, going to find her own piece of prey. "And what does it matter if we were having a little fun? Hunting doesn't have to be such a serious task."

"*Fun* doesn't feed the Clan, Flowerpaw." He spat her name, Flowerpaw winced. "Prey does."

"We caught prey." Flowerpaw replied, picking up her two mice. "See?"

"You two are slow, in leaf-bare prey needs to be caught as quickly as possible." He lashed his tail.

"There's no need to be so rough, Falconclaw." Owlfoot stepped forward, his voice like heather compared to Falconclaw's. "Who cares if they were having some fun while hunting. Like Flowerpaw said, being a warrior doesn't' always have to be so serious. They're just apprentices, let them have their fun."

Falconclaw hissed, and Flowerpaw noticed his claws digging into the snow. The tabby let out a heavy sigh and turned away from the apprentices. "Whatever, let's get back to camp." He lashed his tail once more and started ahead without waiting for the others.

"I don't think I've met another cat who hates fun as much as Falconclaw." Flowerpaw chuckled and looked to Thornpaw, expecting him to agree but his eyes were cast downwards. Her heart dropped and she turned away. *He was having so much fun? Why did Falconclaw have to ruin it?*

"Come on you two." Owlfoot said, his voice soothing. "You must both be freezing, let's get you back to camp." Flowerpaw agreed and walked beside Thornpaw who remaind silent the rest of the way back to camp.

When they reached camp, Flowerpaw was ready to curl up in her warm nest for the night but when they stepped into camp, there

was feeling of dread that washed over the camp. Flowerpaw looked towards the medicine cat den where several cats were gathered. Feathernose was looking at Slatepaw while Firetail sat a few taillengths away.

"What's going on?" Owlfoot questioned, looking at his mate with concern. Alderfang turned around, his eyes sad. "Firetail and Slatepaw are sick."

Chapter 10

Flowerpaw woke up to coughing. She sat up in alarm, looking around the apprentice den to see who it came from. However, each of the apprentices in here where sound asleep. She twitched her ears, hearing it again and realizing that it came from outside the apprentice den. She lowered her head, sickness was running rampant throughout the Clan. Firetail, Slatepaw and Fernsong had all moved to the medicine cat den but they weren't the only ones. Moonfur and Jayflight had also joined them in the medicine cat den.

The Clan was incredibly stressed out with how sickness was gripping the Clan, even the birth of Rowanfall's kits wasn't very celebrated. She had given birth to three kits, Birchkit, Nutkit and WIllowkit, but the Clan was terrified that the kits would get sick. Flowerpaw only hoped that the coughing was from a cat who was already sick and not someone new. Prey was running low and SunClan was struggling.

Flowerpaw looked at her denmates, luckily none of them had become sick, she was terrified of losing any of them. However, three apprentices had to be assigned new mentors while their actual meteors were sick. Stormpaw, Bramblepaw and Sunpaw were now the apprentices of Alderfang, Frostclaw and Nightwing. All three apprentices were incredibly concerned for the well being of their mentors, and Flowerpaw shared their fears.

She closed her eyes, she didn't want the Clan to lose to any of its members. She hadn't experienced death before, and she wasn't sure she could handle it. *Please, StarClan. Don't let any of my friends or family get sick.* She closed her eyes, not knowing what we should do if she lost her parents or Stormpaw. Even if she lost Thornpaw or any of his siblings she would be devastated.

Flowerpaw opened her eyes, looking at Thornpaw who slept soundly. It had been a moon since they went hunting together and even if they hadn't hunted together since, she couldn't help but feel

like the two of them had grown closer to each other. She was grateful that she went hunting with him that day, and she was grateful that he was her friend.

Unable to fall back asleep due to the coughing from her Clanmates, Flowerpaw climbed out of the apprentice den and instantly regretted it as cold swept over her, chilling her to the bone. She looked up to the sky, it was just before sunhigh but the cats of SunClan weren't active. When cats weren't hunting or patrolling, they were hiding in their dens.

"Feathernose!" Flowerpaw tensed as she heard Tallfern calling from the nursery. Flowerpaw turned her head to see the gray and white she-cat standing with Marshpelt at her side. Marshpelt was coughing.

There's sickness in the nursery! Flowerpaw thought in a panic, she looked at the two she-cats while Feathernose ran out of his den.

"Come with me, Marshpelt." Feathernose said calmly.

"My kits need me..." Marshpelt mewed, her voice sounding dry and cracking. "I can't leave them alone."

"They're not alone, Marshpelt." Tallfern assured her friend. "Rowanfall and I will look after them, I promise."

Marshpelt seemed to hesitate, but eventually followed Feathernose. Flowerpaw watched with fear in her heart. *What if the kits get sick?* Flowerpaw looked away, unable to hide or contain her fears. *What happens then? Would they be able to survive greencough?*

"Honeypaw," Feathernose spoke to his apprentice as he lead Marshpelt away from the nursery. "Will you check all the kits for signs of sickness? I need to make sure that Marshpelt didn't spread the sickness."

"Yes, Feathernose." Honeypaw dipped her head and entered the nursery, with Tallfern and Rowanfall following her.

"If I got any of those kits sick..." Marshpelt breathed with a raspy voice. "I will never forgive myself." Her voice slipped into a

whimper.

"You can't control sickness, Marshpelt." Feathernose assured her, wrapping his soft tail around her. "You can't chose who greencough infects, we can only fight against it. For now, you need rest." Flowerpaw watched Marshpelt and Feathernose vanish into the nest that was filled with sick cats.

Orange fur caught her eye and Flowerpaw looked over towards the SunTree where Foxstar was watching with fear in his eyes. "There's not much you can do now, Foxstar." Flowerpaw heard Mallownose's gent mew. "You know she's in capable paws."

"I know, I just--" Foxstar's voice trembled. "I don't know what I would do if I lost her. It's my duty as a leader to protect my Clanmates and my duty as a mate and a father to protect Marshpelt, Barkkit and Rustkit."

"You can't fight greencough." Mallownose insisted. "It's not an enemy warrior, it doesn't have teeth or claws. The ones who can fight it are Honeypaw and Feathernose, and you know they will do their best. Last leaf-bare it was those two who saved several cats from greencough, including myself."

"You're right, Mallownose." Foxstar dropped his head, looking defeated. "I have to stay strong and lead my Clan. That's what I became leader for." His green eyes looked over SunClan camp, he was thinking and pondering. Flowerpaw looked away, shivering slightly.

Feathernose and Honeypaw can handle it, I know they can. She closed her eyes, sending all her prayers to StarClan. *Please, let SunClan survive this.*

"We should get back." Owlfoot looked around, the snow was starting to fall faster and faster. Flowerpaw shook snow from her fur only for it to be instantly covered again. "We don't want to sick too." Flowerpaw couldn't help but agree, she dug up the one mouse that she had caught and began walking close with her mentor back to camp. The sun was going down and it would be night soon, and with the night was coming a storm.

Owlfoot and Flowerpaw quickly reached the camp, but they stumbled upon chaos. Warriors were franticly running around, Feathernose was shouting at someone in his den and Tallfern and Rowanfall were franticly looking around the nursery.

"What's going on?" Owlfoot demanded once he stepped into camp, catching the attention of Alderfang.

"Rustkit and Barkkit are missing." The red-brown warrior responded. "We have no idea where they went."

Flowerpaw's heart dropped. *This is the last thing that SunClan needs!* She looked around. "Where were they seen last?"

"The nursery." Alderfang replied, looking around in a panic. "Tallfern and Rowanfall had them settled down to sleep but when Tallfern woke up, they were gone."

"They've probably run off." Leafwhisker mewed from near the warrior's den. "We need to send out a search party."

"Why would they be so mouse-brained as to run off in the middle of leaf-bare!" Rockfall lashed his tail.

"They're just kits, Rockfall." Mallownose stepped towards her mate, her green eyes troubled. "They're only a mood old and they're probably scared that Marshpelt is sick."

"That's no excuse to run away from camp, they could die out there." Rockfall hissed and turned away, Flowerpaw noticed he was looking towards Cloudpaw who was searching with Brightclaw for the kits. Flowerpaw felt a pang of sympathy for him. *Slatepaw is already sick, is he thinking of losing his own kits?*

"My kits are not dead!" A voice boomed throughout the camp, Flowerpaw jumped and turned to face Foxstar, his green eyes were ablaze with anger. "Stop arguing and go looking for them! Mallownose, take Hawktalon, Moonfur, Leafwhisker and Sandpaw out to search near the moss hollow. Flintstripe take Frostclaw, Brightclaw and Cloudpaw and search near the MoonClan border. Finally, Nightwing, take Stonewhisker, Dovewish and Alderfang and

search towards the AshClan border." Foxstar's voice was sharp and commanding, none of the cats that were instructed hesitated to get started.

"I want every other capable cat searching everywhere else. We have to find them before this snow storm stars!" Flowerpaw could hear the panic in his voice.

"Flowerpaw," Owlfoot looked down at her. "Let's go search."

"We're going with you." Flowerpaw looked up to see Falconclaw and Thornpaw. "These kits need to be found. I suggest we go look in the areas around the nursery, they couldn't have gone too far."

"I agree, let's go." Owlfoot nodded and the group of cats quickly made their way across camp and out the back. The snow was starting to fall even faster, it clumped in their fur and started to blur their vision. Flowerpaw shivered, but she wouldn't give up until those two kits were found.

Flowerpaw sniffed around the snow, trying to find any scent of the two kits. The only scent she found however, was burning scent of frost and snow. The wind burned and bit at her ear tips and nose. *If every cat is out here looking for them, then we could all get sick.*

Flowerpaw, Thornpaw and their mentors trudged through the snow, kicking up flurries as they searched for the kits. In the distance, Flowerpaw could hear cats shouting the names of Barkkit and Rustkit, the whole Clan was franticly trying to find them. Flowerpaw couldn't even find a trace of their tiny paw prints. *How did they get out without being noticed? There's two queens and four other kits in there.*

Flowerpaw shook her head, she couldn't think about that now. *Rustkit and Barkkit need to be found.* She went an opposite direction of Falconclaw who was calling for them in the snow storm. *It's falling faster, this could be a blizzard.* She swallowed her fears and kept on searching. *I know we'll find them.*

They continued their search, they were a good way aways from the camp now and still found now sign of Rustkit or Barkkit. The snow

was falling heavily, covering the forest and snow and freezing the cats who were stuck in it.

"Owlfoot! Falconclaw! Thornpaw! Flowerpaw!" Flowerpaw's ears twitched as she heard a voice calling their names. She turned her head, none of the others had seemed to notice.

"Someone's calling us!" She called to the other warriors , Thornpaw perked his ears up. She heard the voice again and this time the others seemed to have heard it as well.

"Maybe they found the kits." Owlfoot mewed, and began quickly walking back to camp. Flowerpaw, Thornpaw and Falconclaw followed close behind until a figure came into view. Flowerpaw soon made it out to be Frostclaw.

"Frostclaw." Falconclaw called out. "Were the kits found?"

Frostclaw nodded. "Yes, Mallownose's patrol found them not too far from the moss hollow and Feathernose is looking over them now." Flowerpaw breathed out a sigh of relief, so did the cats around her. *Thank StarClan they were found.* "You should all get warm in your nests and rest, if you feel sick then go see Feathernose immediately." The four warriors nodded and made their way back to SunClan.

By the time that Flowerpaw reached the camp, her ears, nose and paws were burning. Her leg ached and her entire body shivered, she was exhausted from the search as well as the panic she had while searching.

Once in camp, Flowerpaw looked towards the medicine cat den where Feathernose was leading Rustkit and Barkkit away, both of them shivered intensely. "Are they sick?" Owlfoot questioned as they passed.

"No, they're just cold." Feathernose replied, sounding incredibly exhausted. "They need to get warm and rest with their denmates."

"Why did you two leave?" Falconclaw growled towards the kits. "You scared the Clan half to death."

"We wanted to find catmint for our mother." Rustkit said sadly, dropping his head low. "She's sick and we wanted to help." Flowerpaw's heart twisted, she turned away and dropped her head. *Of course they just wanted to help.*

"You need to leave that to Feathernose and Honeypaw." Owlfoot said calmly. "It's their job as medicine cats."

"But we don't want Marshpelt to be sick." Barkkit's voice trembled. "We don't want any of the cats to be sick."

"That's not your worry." Feathernose urged them. "Marshpelt and everyone will be just fine, but you need your rest."

Flowerpaw turned away as the medicine cat escorted them back to the nursery, she heard Snakekit and the others welcome them back with jovial mews, but her blood turned cold as she heard the sound of tiny coughing. She turned, expecting it to be from Rustkit or Barkkit. Instead, the coughing came from Birchkit; the pale tom's head was dropped and he coughed heavily. She then noticed with alarm that both Nutkit's and Willowkit's eyes and noses were streaming.

The kits are sick!

Chapter 11

Flowerpaw barely slept, her heart twisted in her chest with each thought of the greencough that plagued the Clan. Willowkit and her littermates had been moved to the nursery and Rowanfall was incredibly distraught, so was the entire Clan. Cats were getting sicker and the Clan had almost no catmint or prey to help them. *Why is this happening to us?* She stood up, letting out a yawn.

Thornpaw, Tigerpaw and Crowpaw were all out of their nests, but Bramblepaw, Rainpaw and Stormpaw remained. Flowerpaw dropped her head, Willowkit, Birchkit and Nutkit were only a few days old, they didn't have the strength of a full grown warrior to fight away greencough and the entire Clan knew it. Alderfang and Rowanfall seemed to be already grieving their kits as if they were already dead.

How can they give up hope so easily. Flowerpaw wondered, she didn't want to believe that those kits would die before they even had a chance to live. *It's unfair, would StarClan really be so cruel?*

Flowerpaw climbed out of the apprentice den and was instantly overwhelmed by the cold. The storm had completely covered the forest in snow that went halfway up Flowerpaw's legs. *I want leaf-bare to end!* She spat, hating the entirety of the season. *It's nothing but death and pain!*

Flowerpaw searched the camp for her mentor, but didn't find many cats at all. The only cats she saw that weren't in a den were Tigerpaw and Mallownose who were talking just in front of camp, both looked cold and troubled. *Every cat in the Clan is stressed.* Flowerpaw looked up towards the sky, the sun was out and high but covered by what Flowerpaw assumed was snow-filled clouds. *I wonder if the other Clans are struggling as much as we are.*

She lowered her head and let out a sigh, she looked at the snow that covered her paws. She wanted nothing more than to see her Clan happy again. Flowerpaw looked up, hearing voices coming

from the medicine cat den. One of them sounded like Owlfoot, the other was obviously Feathernose. *He's probably visiting Firetail, but I thought cats weren't allowed in the medicine cat den.*

Flowerpaw jumped back in alarm as Owlfoot burst out of the medicine cat den, nearly falling into the snow. The brown tom lifted his head and let out a wail of pain, Flowerpaw's heart twisted. Part of her already knew what happened, but she sprinted over to her mentor. "Owlfoot!" She proclaimed. "What happened?"

"Firetail is dead." Owlfoot said, his voice barely above a whisper. Flowerpaw could hear the pain and heartbreak in his voice. Flowerpaw felt fear and pain turn her stomach into knots, she looked up at her mentor, her voice trembling.

"Owlfoot...I'm so sorry." She didn't know what else to do or say, Owlfoot looked like he was in so much pain. *Firetail can't be dead, why would StarClan allow something like this?* The rest of SunClan had heard his cry and were now stepping out into the camp, Flowerpaw looked over her shoulder and spotted Applepaw and Sandpaw who looked at their father with incredibly pain in their eyes.

They already know what happened. Flowerpaw looked away, stepping back to allow Owlfoot's daughters to approach him. *I have to tell Stormpaw.* Flowerpaw looked towards the apprentice den where her sister slept, completely unaware of the fact that her beloved mentor was dead.

"Is Firetail--?" Applepaw questioned her father, green eyes trembling. "Is she dead?" Owlfoot stood up and padded up to his daughters, sitting down once more and pulling both of them close.

"I'm so sorry," He whimpered. "She died before I even woke up, she was so sick. Please know that she loved both of you so much and so do I. I will never stop loving the two of you, for as long as I live."

Sandpaw and Applepaw let out small wails as they fell into their father, closing their eyes and sharing their loss together. Flowerpaw turned away, she couldn't imagine what they were going through. *I don't know if I could handle loving Dovewish.* She flattened her ears

and crossed the camp, nearing the apprentice den.

As she neared the den she noticed that Stormpaw was stepping out of the den, letting out a yawn and shivering as soon as she stepped out. "I think it's even colder than it was yesterday." Stormpaw shook her gray pelt and licked her silver paws, she met Flowerpaw's gaze. *Oh, Stormpaw. I wish I didn't have to tell you this.* Stormpaw tilted her head. "What's wrong, Flowerpaw?" Her blue eyes went past Flowerpaw, resting on Owlfoot and his daughters, her blue eyes went wide and filled with shock. "Is.."

"I'm sorry, Stormpaw." Flowerpaw stepped towards her sister. "Firetail is dead." Flowerpaw watched helplessly as Stormpaw's legs gave out from under her and she sat down, staring at the ground in shock.

"But," Stormpaw whimpered, closing her eyes. Flowerpaw rushed to Stormpaw's side, allowing her sister to fall against her. "Feathernose told us that she was fine...I don't understand how her sickness got so bad." She buried her muzzle in Flowerpaw's fur. Once again, she didn't know what say, she would just let Stormpaw grieve right now.

I wish I could help you, sister. Flowerpaw closed her eyes. *But the only way I could do that is if I could bring Firetail back from the dead.*

News of Firetail's death spread quickly and soon the entire Clan was grief-ridden over the loss of their Clanmate. The air was thick and sullen, Owlfoot, Sandpaw and Applepaw were resting together, mourning their mate and mother.

Tonight, a vigil would be held for Firetail, but Flowerpaw had a sense of dread looming over her. She wondered if it was just because of Firetail's death, or if she was just paranoid that Firetail wouldn't be the last death this season.

Flowerpaw remaind in camp, as did Stormpaw. Flowerpaw's mentor was grieving the death of Stormpaw's mentor and neither of them would probably be leaving camp. Flowerpaw assumed that Alderfang would become Stormpaw's permanent mentor, but that wasn't the thing to think about right now.

The day passed, and it seemed like the longest day of Flowerpaw's life. She dragged her paws with each step, and couldn't shake the looming feeling that clung to her pelt. It pulled her down, and made her feel sick.

A sharp wail pierce the air, sending fear directly into Flowerpaw's heart. The entirety of SunClan and jumped to their paws, facing the direction that the sound came from which was, unfortunately the medicine cat den.

"I've killed the kits!" Flowerpaw's blood turned cold as she recognized the voice of Marshpelt. Foxstar was sprinting across the camp, making it to his mate in a few swift bounds.

"Marshpelt!" He cried for his mate, his voice sounding broken. "Marshpelt, what's wrong?"

"It's all my fault!" The brown she-cat wailed. "It's my fault that they're dead!" She dropped into the snow, Feathernose and Honeypaw ran out behind her.

"Foxstar back up!" Feathernose demanded. "She's in shock, I need to get her back inside."

"What is she talking about?"

"Birchkit and Nutkit are dead!" Feathernose snapped, Foxstar stumbled backwards. "I'm doing the best I can but *back off!*"

"Birchkit and Nutkit are dead?" The voices of SunClan spread in a said panic, Flowerpaw noticed Rowanfall standing outside the nursery with pure shock in her eyes. "What about Willowkit? Is she..alive?"

"Willowkit is alive." It was Honeypaw who replied, lifting her head head. "Birchkit and Nutkit were much worse than she was, but I promise Rowanfall we will do everything we can to keep Willowkit alive."

"But Firetail and two kits died today!" Frostclaw cried. "What if we lose even more? We can't risk to lose all of our warriors."

The Clan broke out in panicked mews, Feathernose was doing his best to get to frantic Marshpelt back into the medicine cat den, but Flowerpaw could see the visible panic and strain on his own face. Looking closer she could see that his pelt was ungroomed. *He's been working so hard.*

"Please!" Honeypaw cried out. "We're doing everything we can, but the sick cats *need* you to stay strong! Stay strong and have hope for them, please do not give up on your loved ones! They need you! Feathernose and I need you!"

The Clan silenced themselves, Flowerpaw felt a pang of empathy as well as a sharp feeling of respect towards Honeypaw. While Feathernose was losing himself, the golden she-cat was keeping her head high and supporting her mentor and at the same time doing everything she could to heal the cats of SunClan. *Honeypaw is an incredible medicine cat.*

"Honeypaw is right." Foxstar lifted his head. "All of our sick cats need us to be strong and to defend the Clan. We cannot fall apart now. No matter what, SunClan will survive this!"

Night was high in the sky, but spirits were incredibly low. The cats of SunClan sat out in the center of camp, just before the SunTree where Foxstar sat, looking down over his Clan. The snow fell slowly, small flakes fluttering towards the ground. Flowerpaw sat close beside Stormpaw, with Dovewish and Stonewhisker on either side of them, keeping their daughters warm.

"The loss of Firetail, Birchkit and Nutkit is incredibly tragic." Foxstar spoke, his voice low and sullen. "Firetail was an incredible warrior, serving SunClan without fear. She had an incredible a brother, a mate and two wonderful, brave daughters." Alderfang held his head low, Flowerpaw had no idea what he could possibly be going through. He had lost a sister and two kits in one day. Applepaw and Sandpaw buried their faces in Owlfoot's brown pelt. "We will never forget her or her contributions to SunClan, she may not be here with us anymore but we know that Firetail watches over from StarClan." The cats lowered their heads, mourning Firetail. "Birchkit and Nutkit never really got to live their lives, their lives were cut entirely too short. However, just as Firetail is;

Birchkit and Nutkit are watching closely over us. I know for a fact that Firetail will care for the two kits in StarClan."

The cats of SunClan lowered their heads, Flowerpaw closed her eyes. Hoping that Firetail, Birchkit and Nutkit were happy and warm in StarClan. Free from pain and sickness."

"We will now hold a silent vigil for Firetail, Birchkit and Nutkit. Remembering all that we can about them, and sending them on a safe journey into StarClan's hunting grounds." Foxstar jumped down from the tree and the Clan gathered around the bodies of Firetail, Birchkit and Nutkit.

Flowerpaw looked at the three dead cats, her heart aching. *I'm so sorry that you three had to die.* She looked up towards the night sky, snowflakes falling on her face. *Please StarClan, please don't let SunClan lose anymore cats.*

Chapter 12

I should be excited about this. Flowerpaw looked towards the sky, for once snow wasn't falling and the sky was clear of all clouds. It wouldn't be long before the full moon was up, and it would be time for the gathering; Flowerpaw's first gathering. She lowered her head, she didn't really feel up to it. It had only been a day since Firetail, Birchkit and Nutkit died from greencough and their loss still stung like a fresh-wound. All the other cats were still sick, and the entirety of the Clan was hungry.

"I apologize for not attending your first gathering with you, Flowerpaw." Flowerpaw turned around upon hearing the strained voice of her mentor Owlfoot. "I can't make the journey, and Applepaw and Sandpaw need me right now."

"It's okay, Owlfoot." She dipped her head. "I understand." Gratitude flooded Owlfoot's green eyes and he padded across camp to sit with his daughters once more. Flowerpaw turned back, she wished that she could help her mentor.

"I'm sorry, Foxstar but both Honeypaw and I will be staying here." Flowerpaw's ears twitched as she heard Feathernose's voice. She looked at the medicine cat, he still looked exhausted and unkempt. "We need to put all of our attention onto the sick cats."

"It's okay, Feathernose." Foxstar dipped his head. "I'm sure the other Clans will understand. We can't be the only ones suffering from greencough. Thank you for being so dutiful."

"It's my job." Feathernose nodded and started walking back to his den, dragging his tail and paws. *I feel so sorry for him.* Flowerpaw thought sadly. *It can't be easy.*

"Alright," Foxstar turned his attention back to SunClan. "It's a small group, but I don't think this will be a long gathering." Flowerpaw looked around at the cats attending, several cats other than Feathernose, Honeypaw and Owlfoot had decided to stay in camp,

not to mention all the sick ones.

"Fishtail," Flowerpaw heard a sense of urgency in Flintstripe's mew. "Are you sure you should go?" She turned to see him talking to Fishtail, his mother and the only elder in SunClan.

"I may be old, Flintstripe." She spat. "But sickness ain't no match for me! I ain't never been sick since the day I was born. I also haven't missed a single gathering since I earned the name Fishtail, nothin' will keep me stuck here on the night of a gatherin'!"

Flintstripe flinched and stepped back, nodding in respect to Fishtail. "When I start coughin' then you can put me in the medicine cat den, but I haven't coughed once, so outta my way." The silver she-cat pushed her way past Flintstripe and looked up at Foxstar. "You wanna stop me?"

"I wouldn't dream of it, Fishtail." Foxstar dipped his head, for a moment he sounded like he was a normal warrior talking to a leader.

Fishtail snorted. "You've always been a charmer, Foxstar." The elder flicked her tail over his ears. "I guess that's why you're our leader though." For a moment, Flowerpaw felt a sense of humor watching the elder. She didn't get to see much of Fishtail, as she would often just stay inside her den.

"Alright," Foxstar lifted his head. "I suppose we should head out, we want to get home as soon as possible." Foxstar began leading the Clan out of the camp. Flowerpaw gave a final glance towards the apprentice den, Stormpaw had decided to stay as she was still very sad about Firetail's death. Flowerpaw was slightly upset that she wouldn't get to experience her first gathering without Stormpaw. *There will be others.* Flowerpaw reminded herself. *She needs her time.*

The apprentices that did go however were Thornpaw and his four siblings. They all walked close together, near their parents however. Flowerpaw walked towards the back of the group, feeling alone. She didn't have her mentor or her sister.

Flowerpaw felt warmth beside her as Dovewish stepped in beside

her. "Why are you so sad? I know the Clan is struggling but an apprentice's first gathering is normally a very exciting moment."

"I know," Flowerpaw looked at her paws as they kicked up snow. "I'm just worried about Stormpaw."

"Stormpaw is sad, the bond between a mentor and apprentice is a close one. One I'm sure you understand." Dovewish mewed softly. Flowerpaw thought of Owlfoot, she genuinely did care about her mentor. *I would be devastated if I lost him.* She nodded. "Stormpaw will be better in time, death is hard and it always will be." She looked towards the sky. "When I was a kittypet I never really had that fear." Flowerpaw blinked, she had never heard her mother mention her life as a kittypet before. "I lived carefree without the fear of death. During leaf-bare I was warm and safe."

Flowerpaw dropped her head. "Sounds like an easy life."

"It was." There was a sense of disappointment in Dovewish's mew. *Does she miss her kittypet life?* "But there was no purpose or joy to my life. Every single day was the same, that is until I met your father." Flowerpaw looked into Dovewish's blue eyes, they were filled with nostalgia and love. "He showed me a new world full of adventure. It was full of dangers, yes, but also full of potential. I never once regret joining SunClan and I will never step foot into the kittypet life again." She looked at Flowerpaw with honey-like soft eyes. "If I never came with your father, then I wouldn't have fallen in love and had two wonderful daughters who I love so much."

Flowerpaw felt a warmth growing in her heart, she pressed against her mother and took in her warmth. A few moments later, Stonewhisker approached them, his amber eyes warm. "What are you two beautiful she-cats talking about?"

"Just reassuring Flowerpaw about Stormpaw." Dovewish purred. "And talking about you."

"Only good things I hope." Stonewhisker touched his nose to Dovewish's and looked at Flowerpaw. "And don't worry about Stormpaw, she's strong and always has been. She'll get through this just fine, and so will Owlfoot and his daughters in time. Death is

hard, and takes time to heal, but everyone will be just fine."

SunClan reached the gathering hollow, her jaw nearly dropping when she saw the magnitude of the place. It was filled with so many cats of different shapes, sizes and colors. They all smelled so different from SunClan.

"We're the last ones to arrive." Foxstar mewed. "Let's hurry." SunClan descended into the snowy hollow, Flowerpaw looked around the many different cats. She recognized a few, including the deputy of AshClan, Ivyheart. She was talking with a group of other cats, one of which was the MoonClan deputy Cloudwind who had a lean gray tabby she-cat at her side. Also among them was an elderly brown she-cat with a golden-brown to.

"SunClan is here!" The gray MoonClan tabby called out. "We can get started."

"I apologize for being late," Foxstar mewed as he approached the other cats.

"It's fine, Foxstar." The elderly she-cat nodded. "Let's just get this started so we can get home."

"Are those cats the leaders?" Flowerpaw asked Stonewhisker quietly.

Stonewhisker nodded. "The old she-cat is Birdstar of LichenClan, and the golden-brown tom is her deputy Jumpheart. MoonClan's leader is Owlstar but it doesn't look like he is here, instead it's the deputy Cloudwind. AshClan's leader, Goldenstar is also missing. It's only Ivyheart."

"I hope that *two* of the leaders haven't died." Dovewish said, sounding incredibly worried.

The leaders jumped up into their trees, and it was Ivyheart who first stood up. "I will start, so I can explain why I am here instead of Goldenstar." The Clans looked up interest. "Goldenstar isn't dead, but she is too sick to travel right now. AshClan has been dealing with a terrible outbreak of greencough that has taken the life of our beloved warrior Tawnyfrost." The Clans went silent, having a

moment of silence for the AshClan warrior. *So the other Clans* have *been dealing with greencough.*

Ivyheart sat down and nodded towards Cloudwind, who stood up. "I wish I could say the same about Owlstar being too sick to travel, but unfortunately Owlstar lost his final life to greencough. I am proud to be leader after his wonderful rule, and my new deputy is Ivystone."

"Owlstar was an incredibly noble and kind cat." Birdstar dipped her head. "He will be very missed, but I know you will be a wonderful leader, Cloudstar." The Clans cheered for Cloudstar and Ivystone.

"Owlstar was not our only death, however. We lost our elder Haretooth and we still have a few sick cats." Cloudstar continued. After the cheering ended, the Clans had another moment of silence.

"Haretooth was a good friend and a great warrior." Fishtail spoke up, Flowerpaw noticed she was sitting with another group of elders. The cats around her agreed.

"I'll go next." Birdstar stood up as Cloudstar sat down. "LichenClan too has been dealing with the horrors of greencough, we've only lost one cat and that was our own elder, Rockflower. A stubborn yet proud and brave she-cat." Once again, the Clans held silence. "In spite of their loss, however. I am proud to welcome three new warriors; Jaggedtail, Maplepool and Elmheart!" Flowerpaw was glad that they had something to celebrate instead of dealing with the constant silences. *But SunClan still has to go.* "Its your turn, Foxstar." Birdstar sat down.

"Thank you, Birdstar." Foxstar stood up, looking over the hollow. "SunClan has not been spared by greencough either this season. Our queen, Rowanfall had three kits but two of those kits died to sickness, the other remains sick. We lost our warrior Firetail as well." Flowerpaw's heart twisted, she dropped her head. All four Clans held silence for the dead cats.

"Before this gathering comes to a close," Birdstar stood up, addressing the Clans. "I just want to take this moment to appreciate the medicine cats of our Clans. They've worked so hard to keep our

Clans healthy, and though I don't see any of them here tonight we know that they were working so hard to keep our Clanmates alive."

There was a series of cheers from the cats of the forest and Flowerpaw cheered along. The medicine cats had been working so hard to help their Clans.

"Sagefeather and Stormsong of LichenClan," Birdstar mewed.

"Eagleclaw and Moonpaw of AshClan." Ivyheart added.

"Skyclaw and Badgerpaw of MoonClan." Cloudstar held her head high.

"Feathernose and Honeypaw of SunClan." Foxstar's voice trembled with pride. "Without our medicine cats, the Clans wouldn't survive."

"I agree." Cloudstar dipped her head. "We should return to our homes, I pray to StarClan that all of your sick cats get healthier."

"I wish the same for all of you." Ivyheart added, jumping down from the trees. Flowerpaw stood up as the other leaders jumped down as well.

"Hopefully at the next gathering you'll be able to meet more cats." Dovewish mewed. "But it's too cold to stay here long." Flowerpaw didn't argue, she wished she could meet other cats but also wanted to be home in her warm nest.

SunClan hurried home, all eager to rest and be warm. However, when they returned, Flowerpaw was surprised to find the Clan surprisingly active. There was a new, happier feeling in the air.

"Thank StarClan you're back!" Flintstripe faced them, joy and relief burning in his green eyes. "Honeypaw found catmint!"

Chapter 13

"Applespots! Sandfoot! Sunstream!" The cats of SunClan cheered their three newest warriors. The three she-cats held their heads high, green eyes brimming with pride. Beside Flowerpaw, Stormpaw jumped with joy and their mentors watch on with pride. Outside the medicine cat den, newly named Honeywing watched her sister with glowing green eyes.

It had been a moon since Firetail and the kits died and Honeywing found catmint. While SunClan was away at the gathering, Honeywing travelled all night to find catmint in the twolegplace and came back to save the Clan. She was then given her full medicine cat name by Feathernose. *I want to announce Honeywing's full medicine cat name. I've given her this name to honor how she has taken all of SunClan under her wing to care for.* Feathernose had announced that to the Clan when they returned from the moonstone.

All the cats that had been sick were now better, Bramblepaw had Fernsong as a mentor again, Marshpelt had returned to the nursery with her kits who were overjoyed, Willowkit was back safely in the nursery with Rowanfall and the rest of the cats had returned to warrior or apprentice duties, in Slatepaw's case. Now, the snow was starting to melt as the forest was welcomed into an early newleaf season. It felt as if a huge, dark cloud had been lifted over SunClan territory and they welcomed in the new season with joy.

Owlfoot has also gotten Flowerpaw back into training, while had had been recovering over the loss of his mate Flowerpaw would tag along training sessions with various mentors. Mostly Stonewhisker or Rockfall, but she was glad to be training with Owlfoot once again.

She turned to her mentor who was now speaking with his daughters, congratulating them on being warriors. Flowerpaw knew that it wouldn't be long before Cloudpaw and Slatepaw became warriors as well, but it was delayed because of Slatepaw's sickness. *I*

know that feeling. Flowerpaw thought with a slight chuckle. Flowerpaw felt as if she had caught up on her apprentice training as well, she wasn't as far behind Stormpaw anymore. Thornpaw, Rainpaw, Bramblepaw, Tigerpaw and Crowpaw were also becoming quite advanced. *I hope we all become warriors together.*

After Owlfoot stepped away from Applespots and Sandfoot, allowing them to celebrate their new titles as warriors. Flowerpaw caught his eye and stood up to face him. She waited for Owlfoot to approach her. "Are we going hunting?" She questioned.

"Sort of," He looked around. "You're going to have a bit of an assessment." He mewed. "Not a warrior assessment, but some of us mentors agreed it would be a good idea to test your skills at the beginning of newleaf."

Flowerpaw tilted her head. "Who is all going to be a part of the assessment."

"Stormpaw, Thornpaw and Tigerpaw." Owlfoot explained. "We thought about doing all of you, but that's a lot. So we decided to group you on how good you are doing. You and the others are the most skilled apprentices out of the bunch; with the exception of Cloudpaw and Slatepaw who are almost warriors."

"Really?" Flowerpaw stared at her mentor in disbelief. "*I'm* one of the most skilled apprentices."

Owlfoot chuckled. "What, you don't believe me?" He nudged her. "I think you are a very good apprentice, you're a wonderful hunter and your fighting skills have improved exponentially."

Flowerpaw looked away, her pelt burning. *Is that really true? I haven't noticed any improvement.* She looked up. "Well, if you say so." She said awkwardly, Owlfoot just looked at her with amusement in his green eyes.

"Let's go meet up with the others, I believe Falconclaw and Thornpaw already headed out." Owlfoot explained, looking around camp. His eyes rested on Alderfang who was talking with Mallownose, Stormpaw and Tigerpaw. She twitched her ears and

followed Owlfoot who padded towards the other mentors. Mallownose looked up, her green eyes looking over both Owlfoot and Flowerpaw.

"Are we ready to go?" The deputy questioned. "This assessment may take a while." Flowerpaw shuffled her paws, what if she failed? What would happen then? Holding back a sigh, Flowerpaw followed the others as they exited the camp.

"Isn't this exciting?" Stormpaw fell in beside Flowerpaw, her blue eyes shimmering. "This is a big deal. I bet our next assessment after this will be our warrior assessments!" *As if I wasn't anxious enough.* Flowerpaw thought, but looked forward.

"Yeah, it's exciting." She forced herself to be cheerful, this was the most excited Flowerpaw had seen her sister since Firetail's death, and she didn't want to take that away from her.

The group padded deeper into the forest, towards the main training area. Flowerpaw soon spotted Thornpaw and Falconclaw waiting for the others to arrive. "About time." The dark tabby growled. "We don't have all day."

"Come now, Falconclaw." Mallownose purred with amusement. "We have *plenty* of time. Don't worry your little tail off." Falconclaw looked cross but didn't respond.

"How are we going to do this?" Alderfang questioned, looking over the four apprentices with intense eyes.

"Stormpaw can hunt near the MoonClan border, Thornpaw and Flowerpaw will hunt near the river border, with Flowerpaw closer to AshClan and Thornpaw closer to Moon, and Tigerpaw will go towards the AshClan border." Falconclaw spoke, instantly taking charge. Flowerpaw felt slightly uneasy, and noticed that Owlfoot shared a similar uneasy gaze.

"Very well." The brown tom simply said. "Go out and catch as much prey as possible. Don't forget that we will be watching very closely at all times." Owlfoot nodded and the four apprentices went in their separate directions.

Flowerpaw held her head low, padding through the forest towards the AshClan border. *I don't know how they expect us to catch so much. With four of us hunting it's not going to be easy.* She let out a sigh and sniffed the air, trying to pick up the scent of prey. The early scent of newleaf was comforting, now that leaf-bare was finally over.

Flowerpaw noticed mouse droppings not too far from where she stood. *There's a mouse nearby.* She told herself and sniffed the air once more, picking up the scent of her future prey. Flowerpaw slowly moved through the undergrowth, dropping to a crouch and keeping her green eyes peeled for the mouse.

She found it idly digging at the ground and prepared herself to pounce. She crept forward, making her pawsteps and breath silent. With a heave, Flowerpaw jumped. Her paws landed neatly on the mouse and she killed it with a swift bite. *Maybe I really am improving.* Flowerpaw thought proudly while she buried her kill.

Flowerpaw left her mouse where it was and started tracking down more prey. *I'm going to do the best I can.* She vowed. *I'll shock them all, even Falconclaw!* Flowerpaw moved through the forest, hearing the quick pace of the river through the trees. She turned her head, catching the sparkling surface. She watched it for a moment, a feeling of unease filling her chest. Flowerpaw swallowed it and continued hunting.

She found the scent of squirrel and quickly began tracking it down, finding it not far from the river and near the base of a tree. Dropping into a crouch, Flowerpaw began her hunt. She kept her eyes firmly on the squirrel and readied herself to pounce. Another quick, clean jump and Flowerpaw now had two pieces of prey caught. With her confidence growing, Flowerpaw continued.

She quickly found another mouse and prepared to catch it, but as she moved forward she heard the movement of leaves near her. She perked her ears up and looked around in alarm. *It's probably Owlfoot.* She reminded herself and shook her head, turning back to see if the mouse was where it remained. Thankfully the mouse hadn't heard the shuffle of leaves and it remained, nibbling on seeds.

Flowerpaw moved forward and braced herself to pounce. When she jumped, the ground beneath her paw gave out and pain shot through her previously injured leg. She let out a sharp yelp of pain and dropped to the floor like a stone, the mouse darted away. With a groan of pain, Flowerpaw sat up, trying to apply pressure to her hind leg. Pain shot like lightning and she let out a yelp.

"Flowerpaw!" She heard the call of Owlfoot and watched as her mentor burst through the trees. "Are you okay? What happened."

"I don't know..." Flowerpaw glanced at her aching leg, her eyes scanned the ground and she noticed that there was a hole in the ground. *How did I not see that?* Flowerpaw questioned. *I was so attentive...*

"Is your leg okay?" Owlfoot questioned, looking at Flowerpaw with concern in his green eyes.

"I don't know." Flowerpaw bit back the pain, trying once more to put pressure onto her paw. Her body collapsed from the pain and she fell to the ground, kicking up leaves. *Why now?* She wanted to cry, but bit back her pain. She wanted to bury her face in the sand. *I'm such a mouse-brain.*

"Is everything alright over here?" Flowerpaw heard the familiar voice of Falconclaw. She lifted her head and saw the tabby pushing his way through the trees, his amber eyes looked curiously down at Flowerpaw on the ground.

"Flowerpaw stepped in a hole and twisted her paw." Owlfoot explained. "It's the one she injured as a kit."

Falconclaw narrowed his eyes. "Perhaps you should look where you're going while hunting."

I was. Flowerpaw thought sadly, lowering her head.

"You should take her to Feathernose." Falconclaw told Owlfoot.

"But my assessment!" Flowerpaw cried out, trying to stand up. *I can't fall behind. Not again!*

"You're in no condition to hunt." Falconclaw said sharply. "If you sprained your ankle again then you'll want to get it treated as soon as possible."

"We'll plan another assessment as soon as you're able to, Flowerpaw." Owlfoot mewed, his green eyes somewhat sad. "But Falconclaw is right, you need to get treated." Flowerpaw didn't respond, she could feel embarrassment tearing at her heart. "Let me help you help."

Owlfoot helped Flowerpaw to her paws, with the exception of her injured one which she kept off the ground. Flowerpaw leaned against Owlfoot as they made their way back to camp. *I'm so stupid.* Flowerpaw told herself repeatedly. *I should've seen that stupid hole. I shouldn't have injured myself again.* She dropped her head, self-hatred and pain running through her entire body. What if she had injured herself for good?

Chapter 14

Flowerpaw lifted her head, feeling incredibly down. She blinked the sleep out of her eyes, sunlight shining across her face. Normally, she would've welcomed the bright, newleaf sunshine but she didn't want to step outside. Her leg still ached from injuring it two days ago and she was back in the medicine cat den with Feathernose and Honeywing. She dropped her head, resting it on her legs. Both medicine cats seemed to be out gathering herbs and she was incredibly grateful.

Since her accident, Flowerpaw had been incredibly sad and bitter about the whole situation. She had worked so hard to get the place she was at with her training, and now she would fall even more behind. *I was so close to being a warrior too.* Flowerpaw buried her nose in her paws, trying to hide from the world.

"Hey there," A voice spoke from the entrance of the medicine cat den, Flowerpaw's ears twitched. "You alright?" Flowerpaw lifted her head and saw Thornpaw standing there with concern in his eyes.

"I guess." She couldn't hide her despair, so why would she try? Flowerpaw looked away, resting her chin on her paws.

"I'm sorry that you got hurt again." She could hear him stepping further into the medicine cat den.

"I shouldn't have gotten hurt." She snorted. "I should've been paying attention to where I was going."

"It was an honest mistake, Flowerpaw." Thornpaw was trying incredibly hard to be reassuring. "It could've happened to any cat."

"But it didn't." Flowerpaw flicked her tail. "It happened to *me.*" She sighed. "I just want to be alone, Thornpaw." She closed her eyes, wishing he would leave.

"Flowerpaw--"

"Thornpaw!" A sharp hiss came from outside the medicine cat den, pulling both Thornpaw's and Flowerpaw's attention out there. It was Falconclaw, looking incredibly annoyed with his apprentice. "We have better things to do than hang out in the medicine cat den."

"I was just checking on Flowerpaw." Thornpaw defending himself.

"That's not your job. You're not a medicine cat, you're a warrior. " Falconclaw's amber eyes cut into Flowerpaw, she tensed. "Flowerpaw got injured and now she has to rest in the medicine cat den, but you don't have to. You need to train if you want to be a semi-competent warrior."

Thornpaw winced slightly at Falconclaw's words, but turned away and followed his mentor without another word to Flowerpaw. Flowerpaw felt incredibly uncomfortable with what had just happened, she knew Falconclaw was a harsh mentor but now he just seemed rude. *Why's he's always around anyway?* Flowerpaw thought with contempt. She crossed her paws and looked at the ceiling of the medicine cat den.

Whenever I'm talking with Thornpaw he shows up looking all angry. She looked down. *Does Falconclaw not like me? We're Clanmates, we should get along.* Then Flowerpaw had a moment of realization. *He doesn't like my mother.* Flowerpaw flexed her claws. *Dovewish is just as capable a warrior as he is, and I'm no kittypet.* She lashed her tail. *What a jerk.* She looked out into camp, Falconclaw and Thornpaw were nowhere in sight. *I really hope he doesn't convince Thornpaw that my sister and I are kittypets because of our mother.*

Flowerpaw sat outside the medicine cat, resting her injured leg and eating a small piece of prey. Honeywing and Feathernose allowed her to sit outside and get some fresh air, she was already feeling antsy enough. She watched the camp, the sun was going down at the Clan was starting to settle down. Outside the nursery, Rustkit, Barkkit, Snakekit and Willowkit were playing under the watch of Tallfern and Rowanfall, though Marshpelt was nowhere in sight.

Flowerpaw, as well as a few other SunClan warriors, felt that Marshpelt hadn't quite gotten over the death of Rowanfall's two other kits, and that she still blamed herself. Flowerpaw hoped that

Marshpelt would feel better about it soon, she was such a nice she-cat.

Flowerpaw heard the entrance to camp rustling and she turned her head to see Falconclaw returning to camp with Thornpaw at his side, the two had quite a bit of prey. They set it down on the pile and Falconclaw went towards the warrior's den, leaving Thornpaw away. He had a distant look in his amber eyes.

"Hey! Thornpaw!" Flowerpaw called to her friend. He looked up, twitching his ears in response. He looked around before padding over to her. "Sorry about before."

"It's okay." Thornpaw replied, something seemed off about it. He kept looking towards the warrior's den and looked very uneasy.

"Is everything alright?" Flowerpaw tilted her head. "You seem like you're on edge, did something happen?"

"Yeah," Thornpaw forced his gaze to focus on Flowerpaw. "Just...rough training."

Flowerpaw narrowed her eyes. "Is Falconclaw being a good mentor to you?" She questioned. Alarm flashed in Thornpaw's eyes and he took a step back, his ears flattening slightly.

"What do you mean? He's a great mentor, he trains me very well." Thornpaw's voice a very slight tremble to it.

"He might train good, but are you two close? A mentor isn't supposed to just teach an apprentice how to fight and hunt, they're supposed to be friendly and encouraging. Help them build confidence." Flowerpaw thought of Owlfoot, who had done just that for her." *He's a great mentor.*

"Y-yeah," Thornpaw took another step back. "He does all of that, he's a great mentor."

"Are you sure? Because he seems like he treats you like crowfood. He's rude and he's rude to me, I don't think he likes me very much because of my mother."

"Your mother?" Thornpaw blinked. "Well, he doesn't really like kittypets."

"She's *not* a kittypet." Flowerpaw raised her lip, getting slightly defensive. What had Falconclaw told him about Dovewish. "And neither am I."

"Well, yeah," Thornpaw looked back towards the warrior's den. "I know you're not a kittypet, you were born in SunClan."

"So does that mean just because my mother wasn't born in SunClan she's not a warrior?" Flowerpaw stood up, keeping weight off her injured leg, but getting in Thornpaw's face.

"Flowerpaw," He shuffled his paws awkwardly. "You have to understand, your mother may be a warrior now but she was a born a kittypet. Falconclaw told me, once a kittypet, always a kittypet."

"*Falconclaw* is a jerk!" Flowerpaw hissed, Thornpaw stumbled back in alarm. "And so are you for believing him! My mother is a better warrior than you'll ever be because she *cares* about the cats in her Clan. Unlike *you!*" Flowerpaw spun around, nearly stumbling because of her leg, but made it inside, leaving Thornpaw behind.

When she stepped inside, Feathernose and Honeywing were giving her a questioning gaze. "Is everything okay?" Honeywing asked quietly.

"Falconclaw is teaching Thornpaw that my mother isn't a real warrior because she was born a kittypet." Flowerpaw's ears flattened, she sat down in her nest.

"Flowerpaw," Feathernose stepped forward. "I remember when your mother joined the Clan. My mentor had recently passed, so I was a fairly new medicine cat." The silver tom sat down and looked Flowerpaw in the eyes. "The entire Clan was unsure of your mother when she was first was brought into the Clan by your father. However, despite all odds she proved herself to be a strong warrior. There were always cats who didn't quite believe that your mother would ever lose her kittypet lifestyle. Falconclaw was one of them and still is, unfortunately.

"Your mother adjusted so quickly to Clan life that part of me thinks that she never really had kittypet blood. She was a natural hunter and fighter, and so dedicated to learning how to be a warrior." His blue eyes softened. "Dovewish won the hearts of the entirety of SunClan and she never let cats like Falconclaw bring her down, she knew she was a warrior and that's what drove her forward." He looked down at Flowerpaw. "And you need to do the same thing. You know your mother is a warrior and you know that you are a warrior, it doesn't matter what Falconclaw or even Thornpaw thinks because you know the truth."

Flowerpaw blinked, feeling moved and inspired by Feathernose's story. He was right, Flowerpaw knew she was a warrior and Dovewish was an incredible warrior. She lifted her head. "Thank you, Feathernose. I'll remember that." Feathernose nodded, his eyes sparkling. Flowerpaw shifted her gaze to Honeywing who looked at her mentor with a fierce admiration in her eyes.

As Honeywing and Feathernose settled down in their nests, having quiet talks about their medicine cat duties, Flowerpaw laid down in her own nest. Her mind wandering to the stars. She wished she could've seen her mother as a fierce, young warrior. To see her grow, her confidence going from tame a kittypet to a warrior. *I hope I can be half the warrior that my mother is.*

Chapter 15

Flowerpaw tested her paw, pain going up her leg. She winced and stumbled forward, trying to balance herself. She looked over at Feathernose who was watching her intensely. He looked at her paw and then seemed to mumble something to himself.

"How much does it hurt?" He questioned.

"Not as much, but," Flowerpaw looked at her injured paw. "It still hurts though." She couldn't shake the feeling of uncertainty clinging to her.

"Less pain is an improvement." Feathernose's tone was light, he was trying to be uplifting. "You can move back into the apprentice den but it could still be a few days before you're back on your duties."

Flowerpaw sighed. "Thanks." She couldn't force herself to feel upbeat, she was falling behind on her apprentice training and there was nothing she could do about it.

"I'm doing all that I can, Flowerpaw." Feathernose brushed his fluffy tail across her pelt. "It just takes time, but you'll be back on your paws before you know it." The medicine cat turned and vanished back into his den. Flowerpaw felt guilt creeping up on her, she knew that Feathernose was doing everything in his power to help her leg heal. *It's not his fault, it's mine.* She dropped her head, feeling even worse than she did before.

Flowerpaw's ears twitched as she heard the voice of her sister. She looked up to see Stormpaw walking into camp with Cloudpaw and Slatepaw, all three of their eyes were glowing and they were laughing. Flowerpaw narrowed her eyes, why were they so happy? Flowerpaw watched as Alderfang, Flintstripe and Briarheart all padded over towards Foxstar's den.

Flowerpaw caught Stormpaw's gaze and for a moment there was a flash of guilt across her blue eyes. Stormpaw said something to

Cloudpaw and Slatepaw before padding over to Flowerpaw who was sitting near the drinking pool. "Hey," Flowerpaw greeted her sister. "What's going on?"

"Well," Stormpaw shuffled her silver paws. "Alderfang spoke with Briarheart and Flintstripe and...." She trailed off. Flowerpaw blinked, feeling nervous. "Our mentors thought it was time for us to become warriors."

Flowerpaw's heart dropped, feeling as if it shattered into a million pieces. "You--you're becoming a warrior?" Stormpaw looked away, flattening her ears.

"I'm sorry, Flowerpaw." Her voice was a whimper. When Flowerpaw saw the look on her sister's face, her heart broke all over but for a different reason.

"No, Stormpaw." Flowerpaw nudged her sister. "Don't be sorry for becoming a warrior, you earned it." Stormpaw looked up, the guilt still there. "I'll become a warrior when it's my time, but until then I'm gonna celebrate you becoming a warrior." Stormpaw's eyes lit up and so did Flowerpaw's heart. "And during the ceremony, I'll be cheering louder than any other cat in the Clan."

Stormpaw pressed up against Flowerpaw. "That means the world to me." She purred. "And when it comes to your warrior ceremony I'll do the same thing for you."

"Thank you." Flowerpaw said quietly, her heart still having a slight ache. *I should be made a warrior with you.* She thought painfully. *But I won't let my sadness ruin your big day.* She stepped back from her sister, loving the look of excitement on her face. *And it's all worth it as long as you're happy.*

Stormpaw ran off to Alderfang as he and the other two mentors stepped out of the leader's den when Foxstar coming out behind them. Behind Flowerpaw, Dovewish and Stonewhisker stepped up. "We heard about your sister becoming a warrior." Dovewish mewed softly.

"Yeah," Flowerpaw breathed out in a sigh. "I'm proud of her.'

"And *we're* proud of *you*." Stonewhisker nudged Flowerpaw. She looked up in confusion at her father. "We know you're struggling, and you want to be made a warrior as well. Yet, you're keeping a brave face for your sister. You may not have your warrior name yet, but you have the heart of a leader."

Heart of a leader? Stonewshisker's words echoed in her mind. "What does that mean?" She questioned.

"A leader will make sacrifices for the overall happiness of their Clan. It's not quite a big situation for the whole Clan, but it's a big deal to you and your sister. You may not be happy but you did your best to make sure that Stormpaw is."

"I suppose." Flowerpaw looked at the ground, slumping over.

"Just wait and see, Flowerpaw." Dovewish nuzzled Flowerpaw's cheek. "You'll see someday how much this one action will pay off your for you." Flowerpaw did her best to hold onto parent's words, wanting to truly believe them.

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath the SunTree for a Clan meeting!" Flowerpaw looked up as Foxstar called the Clan together from the SunTree. *This is it.* Flowerpaw followed her parents to the center of camp.

Mallownose looked at her kits from her position, sharing a loving look with Rockfall who looked just as proud as she did. Flowerpaw watched her sister sit before the SunTree and felt a rush of pride for her sister. *I really am so proud of her.* Flowerpaw thought, her heart feeling light.

Once the Clan had gathered, Foxstar jumped down to face the future warriors. "Today we are welcoming three new warriors into SunClan." The leader spoke proudly. "I call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on these apprentices. They have trained long and hard to understand the ways of your noble code and I commend them to you as warriors in their turn." The three apprentices were trembling with excitement. "Cloudpaw, Slatepaw and Stormpaw do you promise to uphold the warrior code and defend the Clan, even at the cost of your life?"

"I do." Slatepaw replied, his voice steady.

"I do." Cloudpaw was trembling, but confident.

"I do." The sound of pride and confidence in Stormpaw's mew made Flowerpaw even more happy for her sister.

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior names." Foxstar looked at Slatepaw. "Slatepaw, from this day forward you will be known as Slateclaw. StarClan honors your bravery and strength." Slateclaw licked Foxstar's shoulder and the leader touched his nose to Slateclaw's forehead. Foxstar stepped back and continued. "Cloudpaw, from this day forward you will be known as Cloudstorm, StarClan honors your kindness and energy." Cloudstorm and Foxstar repeated the same process and then Foxstar continued. Flowerpaw tensed, watching her sister become a warrior. "Stormpaw, from this day forward you will be known as Stormwind. StarClan honors your determination and spirit." Foxstar and Stormwind exchanged the shoulder lick and forehead nuzzle and then Foxstar stepped back, overlooking the brand new warriors. "I am proud to welcome you all as full warriors of SunClan!"

The Clan stood up and began cheering. "Slateclaw! Cloudstorm! Stormwind!" Flowerpaw cheered as loud as she could, just like she promised. When the cheering stopped, Stormwind bounded over to her family.

"Oh, we're so proud of you!" Dovewish pressed against Stormwind, both she-cats purring incredibly loudly.

"Thank you." Stormwind nuzzled each of her parents, then turned to face Flowerpaw. "Don't you worry, your warrior ceremony will be here before you know it! I promise!"

"Thank you." Flowerpaw replied, keeping her tone light. *I will become a warrior.* She vowed. *No matter how long it takes, I will be a warrior that my family can be proud of!*

Chapter 16

Flowerpaw placed her paw firmly on the ground, feeling no pain. There was a feeling of excitement and put more pressure down, still no pain. She lifted her head and looked up at Feathernose who was watching with interest. "Does it hurt?" He questioned.

"Not at all." She purred, continuing to put even more pressure on it. "It feels pretty good actually," She added. "It hasn't hurt for the past couple days."

"That's wonderful news." Feathernose stood up and looked around. "I'm going to go tell Owlfoot that you're cleared for hunting and battle training."

"Thank you, Feathernose!" Flowerpaw exclaimed, her paws itching to get out and train, she wanted to run and hunt. She had been confined to camp for so long. It had been six days since Stormwind's warrior cat ceremony and for the past two Flowerpaw was cleared to collect moss and help but not much else. However, her leg was healed now and she felt that she could run across the entire territory.

Flowerpaw saw Feathernose speaking with Owlfoot across camp and Owlfoot lifted his head, green eyes shining bright. He turned to look at Flowerpaw and padded over to her while Feathernose returned to his den. Flowerpaw stood to face her mentor, puffing out her chest and holding her head high.

"Feathernose told me the good news." Owlfoot purred. "I suppose you want to get out there and hunt?"

"Absolutely!" Flowerpaw could hardly contain her excitement.

"Then let's get out there!" Owlfoot turned and quickly made his way out of camp, Flowerpaw followed very close behind him, breathing in the fresh newleaf air. The forest filled her with an energy that she had longed for so much. "Go out and hunt as much as you want

to, Flowerpaw." Owlfoot sat down and nodded to Flowerpaw to go hunt.

Flowerpaw broke into a sprint, testing the limits of her healed leg. Her paws hit the ground, propelling her through the beautiful forest. She came to a stop, breathing in the forest and taking in her surroundings. She closed her eyes, trying to scent her prey. She caught the scent of mouse not too far from where she was standing. She scanned the forest, catching a glimpse of movement to her left.

Flowerpaw crouched down, her eyes intently looking over the forest floor to make sure that there were no ways she could make a mistake or hurt herself again. Once she had a good feel for her surroundings, Flowerpaw crept forward to catch her prey. The mouse was sitting still in a small pile of leaves.

Flowerpaw extended her claws, getting low to the ground and waiting for the right moment. She narrowed her eyes and focused. Flowerpaw took a deep breath and then attacked, leaping forward and hitting the mouse with ease and precision. She killed it with a swift bite to the next and sat up proudly. She forgot how much she loved the rush of a hunt, the taste of fresh mouse blood on her tongue.

I'm not stopping there! Flowerpaw told herself, buried her mouse and continued hunting. She trekked through the forest, forgetting the time she had spent confined to camp and just focusing on her hunt.

She caught two more mice and a squirrel before she spotted Owlfoot coming for her. She looked at her mentor, had he been watching? "Great hunting, Flowerpaw." He praised, warming every part of Flowerpaw's heart. "I knew you wouldn't lose your hunting skills."

"It comes naturally to me now." Flowerpaw replied, her paws itching to hunt some more. She looked around the forest, every sound getting her attention.

"That's wonderful." Owlfoot purred. "There was something I wanted to talk to you about."

Flowerpaw turned her attention back on her mentor. "What is it?" She questioned, twitching her ears in interest.

"Well, I've spoke with Mallownose and the other remaining mentors and they believe that Tigerpaw and his siblings are ready to become warriors." Flowerpaw's heart skipped, what did this mean for her? "And since you became an apprentice alongside them it would make sense that you became a warrior with them as well. Today was a bit of a test, I was worried you would take some time to adjust back to hunting, but you've proven me wrong." Flowerpaw's heart was pounding in her chest.

"You think I'm ready to become a warrior?" Was all she could say, her body started to shake with excitement.

"Do you?" Owlfoot's green eyes were steady and intense.

Flowerpaw thought for a moment, did she think she was ready to be a warrior? Stormwind was a warrior and Flowerpaw longed for that same thing. She wanted to be on patrol and have an apprentice of her own. Flowerpaw nodded. "I am ready to become a warrior."

"That's what I thought." Owlfoot brushed his tail across Flowerpaw's pelt. "Tomorrow the six of you will have your warrior assessments and if everything goes well, you'll be a warrior tomorrow as well."

Flowerpaw followed Owlfoot back to camp, barely able to contain her excitement. She would pass the assessment with flying colors, she was sure of it! Flowerpaw wished Owlfoot a good night and went to the apprentice den. Rainpaw, Tigerpaw and Crowpaw were all sitting outside and talking eagerly. Flowerpaw assumed that their mentors told them the same thing.

"Hi!" Flowerpaw greeted her friends and padded up to them.

"Hi, Flowerpaw." Rainpaw purred. "Did Owlfoot tell you about tomorrow?" She questioned.

Flowerpaw nodded. "And I'll be able to partake." She told her denmates, sitting down beside Crowpaw.

"That's wonderful news." Tigerpaw mewed, his voice soft. "We're all

so excited to become warriors."

"I am too." Flowerpaw spotted Stormwind sitting by the warrior's den with Cloudstorm, laughing and sharing prey. *Tomorrow I'll be in the same world as you, Stormwind. We can be warriors together.*

"The assessment is simple." Mallownose mewed, looking over the six eager apprentices. Flowerpaw was in between Rainpaw and Bramblepaw, Thornpaw was at the far end of the line and Flowerpaw felt a slight ache in her heart. She hadn't spoken with Thornpaw since he made the kittypet remarks about her mother. *I don't want to fight with him, but I can't just let him make those kind of comments.* She shoved her worries into the back of her mind. *I need to focus on this assessment.* "Go out and hunt as much as you can, we will be watching you."

"After a while," Stonewhisker stepped forward. "We'll bring you back here and you'll hunt in teams for the final part." His green eyes rested on Flowerpaw, filled with pride and encouragement. Flowerpaw was happy Stonewhisker was Rainpaw's mentor, he would be able to overlook her final assessment!

"Now get out there and hunt!" Owlfoot shouted joyfully and the six apprentices scattered. Flowerpaw headed towards her favorite hunting spot, near the river. She always had the best luck there. *With the exception of hurting my paw.* She thought with slight laughter. *But that won't happen this time!*

Flowerpaw began her search for prey, quickly scenting a mouse and hunting it down with ease. She buried it and looked around. *Warrior den here I come!* She thought with confidence and continued her hunt. She tracked down a squirrel and another mouse, catching them and burying them. She was satisfied with her catch but wouldn't stop until Owlfoot came to get her.

Behind Flowerpaw came the sound of fluttering wings. She turned around to see a sparrow landing on a stone. She was never very good at catching birds, but if she caught it Owlfoot would be so proud. She dropped into a low crouch, creeping as slowly and as silently as she could manage. The bird was completely unaware of her presence. She extended her claws, getting ready to pounce.

Flowerpaw gave a mighty leap, sending the bird into the air but she cut it off. Her claws hooking into its wings and dragging it out of the sky, killing it with a bite to the neck. Flowerpaw held her head high and proud, feeling incredibly proud of herself. She buried the sparrow and continued, quickly finding another mouse.

As she was burying the mouse, Owlfoot stepped out from the trees, green eyes sparkling. Flowerpaw turned to face her mentor. "Good hunting, Flowerpaw." He praised. "But it's time for team hunting, come with me."

Flowerpaw followed Owlfoot back to original meeting location, just outside the training area. She arrived at the same time as Crowpaw and Rockfall. She sat down with the apprentices once more.

"Now that you've hunted alone you'll be split into teams. One cat will take the lead of the hunt and command the hunting party." Falconclaw explained, flicking his ears. "You will be judged on your hunting skills and leadership skills for the ones leading."

"The teams will be Tigerpaw and Crowpaw, Thornpaw and Bramblepaw and Flowerpaw and Rainpaw. The leaders being Tigerpaw, Thornpaw and Flowerpaw." Mallownose mewed.

Flowerpaw flattened her ears slightly. She was going to lead the hunting party? She looked at Rainpaw who looked very eager to get started. Flowerpaw faced forward, she was excited too and she knew that she could lead Rainpaw and herself to a successful hunt.

"You may go hunt." Falconclaw dipped his head tne sent the apprentices on their way.

"Where should we go hunt?" Rainpaw asked once they were away from the other apprentices. Flowerpaw thought for a moment, not wanting to seem anxious about leading.

"Let's go towards the AshClan border." She said, Rainpaw following her without question. Flowerpaw led Rainpaw near the border, scenting for prey. "Let me know if you scent anything."

Rainpaw nodded and the two began sniffing for prey. Flowerpaw

caught the scent of squirrel and got Rainpaw's attention. Flowerpaw wasn't used to hunting with others, but she remembered hunting with Thornpaw a while back. She motioned with her tail for Rainpaw to get behind the mouse to secure the catch. She nodded and crept around the mouse, hiding behind some brush.

Flowerpaw dropped into a crouch and moved forward, her pawsteps silent. When she pounced, the mouse ran but went straight into Rainpaw's claws. She lifted her head, blue eyes sparkling. "Great job." She purred.

"You too." Flowerpaw replied, Rainpaw had very quick reflexes. She had never really seen the black she-cat hunt before, but she was getting a feel for her skills very quickly. The pair continued the hunt, Flowerpaw grew very used to leading and telling Rainpaw where to go. It was easy and felt natural to her.

After two squirrels, Stonewhisker and Owlfoot stepped out. "Good job both of you." Stonewhisker said kindly. "Grab your prey and let's return to the others."

Flowerpaw's stomach twisted into a knot. This was it, this was when she would find out if she would be made a warrior. She tried to swallow the stone in her throat and followed Stonewhisker and Owlfoot. Rainpaw walked with confidence beside her, wasn't she nervous? Flowerpaw struggled to keep her pawsteps steady as went to find the rest of her prey.

Each of the apprentices had a respectable amount of prey in front of them, they each sat with confidence and Flowerpaw tried to find that same confidence, she couldn't help but feel incredibly anxious.

"Let's start with Tigerpaw," Mallownose mewed, looking kindly at her apprentice. "You hunted well on your own, being incredibly careful and you took charge very easily. You led Crowpaw and yourself to a successful team hunt." Tigerpaw dipped his head, trying to look stoic but Flowerpaw could see the excitement burning in his eyes.

"Crowpaw," Rockfall stepped forward. "Your hunting skills and very precise and and you listen to command without hesitation. Your

tracking is impeccable and your kills and clean." The she-cat held her head high.

"Rainpaw," Stonewhisker was next. "Your reactions are quick and on point and you follow orders without complaint." Flowerpaw looked at her mentor, it was Owlfoot's turn to speak. What would he say about her?

"Flowerpaw," Owlfoot's eyes sparkled. "Even with the time you spent in the medicine cat den you clearly have not lost your skill. Your hunting skills are strong and you took a very confident lead." Flowerpaw's heart raced as Owlfoot assessed her, did she really do that good?

"Bramblepaw," Briarheart looked at her apprentice, Flowerpaw was still focused on Owlfoot. "You are a very dedicated and patient hunter who listens well to instruction and command. You have proven to be a noble cat."

"Finally, Thornpaw." All eyes went to Falconclaw, the fiercest mentor among them. His amber eyes resting intently on his nephew. "You are a strong hunter and fierce fighter. You lead with conviction and you have the heart of a warrior." Flowerpaw blinked, she was pretty sure that was the nicest thing Falconclaw has ever said, at least with other cats around him.

"Then I believe it's settled. " Mallownose stood up. "Let's get back to camp and hold a warrior ceremony!"

Chapter 17

Flowerpaw and her fellow apprentices walked into camp, their heads held high. It was finally time for their warrior ceremony, they would receive their warriors names and have a whole new array of responsibilities. It was nearly sunhigh and SunClan was incredibly active, Barkkit, Rustkit and Snakekit were all playing outside with each other. Fishtail was talking with Flintstripe and Tallfern outside the elder's den and Feathernose and Honeywing were drying herbs in the sun. It was a beautiful newleaf day and the perfect day for a warrior ceremony.

The group of mentors went to the SunTree to speak with Foxstar who was presumably inside his den. Flowerpaw looked at Rainpaw and Crowpaw, the two sisters were excitedly talking about the ceremony, all of them looked eager to become warriors and Flowerpaw was no different.

Flowerpaw stepped away from the group, wanting to share the news with her own family. Stormwind was talking with Alderfang and Applespots near the warrior's den. Flowerpaw bounded up to her sister, Stormwind turned her attention to Flowerpaw. "Hi there!" She greeted cheerfully. "What's up?"

"Me and Nightwing's kits just passed our warrior assessment." Flowerpaw held her head high. "Our mentors are talking to Foxstar right now."

"That's awesome!" Stormwind jumped up, bouncing around Flowerpaw. "You're finally gonna be a warrior! We can hunt together and go on patrols together! I'm so proud of you!" Stormwind nuzzled Flowerpaw who let out a laugh, pressing against her sister. *That's all I want.* She thought.

"Looks like it's time." Alderfang motioned over towards the SunTree where Foxstar was stepping out along with the mentors, Mallownose remaind by his side.

"Get over there." Stormwind shoved Flowerpaw towards the SunTree. "I'll go get our parents! They'll be so happy!" With a flick of her gray tail, Stormwind bounded away, looking for Dovewish and Stonewhisker.

Barely able to contain her excitement, Flowerpaw walked swiftly over to the group of apprentices, watching Foxstar with joy in their eyes. Foxstar climbed the SunTree, looking over the camp with his green eyes. "Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath the SunTree for a Clan meeting!" His voice echoed throughout the hollow.

Flowerpaw walked with the other apprentices to the center of camp as the Clan started to gather. Off to her side, Flowerpaw spotted Stormwind sitting with Dovewish and Stonewhisker, their eyes filled with joy, pride and love. Flowerpaw's heart skipped, now it was her time to be made a warrior! Flowerpaw sat down between Rainpaw and Bramblepaw, gazing up at Foxstar on the SunTree. "I've called the Clan to gather because it is time for the six apprentices to become warriors." There were murmurs of excitement from the cats around them. "This is probably the biggest ceremony I will hold in my lifetime, and I couldn't be happier to do it."

Foxstar jumped down, facing the six apprentices. "I, Foxstar, leader of SunClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on these apprentices, for they have trained long and hard to understand the ways of your noble code and I commend them to you as warriors in their turn." Flowerpaw trembled slightly, a million emotions racing through her body. "Thornpaw, Tigerpaw, Bramblepaw, Rainpaw, Crowpaw and Flowerpaw. Do you promise to uphold the warrior code and defend the Clan even at the cost of your lives?"

"I do." Thornpaw's voice was bold and loud, his amber eyes bright and full of confidence.

"I do." Tigerpaw's voice held the same bravery.

"I do." Bramblepaw's voice was steady, his green eyes full of certainty.

" I do." Rainpaw's voice trembled but with excitement rather than fear.

"I do." Crowpaw's sounded full of confidence.

"I do." Flowerpaw spoke, keeping her voice steady despite the excitement that was making her body tremble.

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior names." Foxstar stepped closer. "Tigerpaw, from this day forward you will be known as Tigertail. SunClan honors your courage and fighting skill." Tigertail stepped forward, licking Foxstar's shoulder and Foxstar touched his muzzle to Tigertail's forehead. "Bramblepaw, from this day forward you will be known as Bramblepelt. SunClan honors your nobility and bravery." Bramblepelt repeated the same process." "Thornpaw, from this day forward you will be known as Thornpelt. SunClan honors your strength and independence. Crowpaw, from this day forward you will be known as Crowfur. SunClan honors your spirit and hunting skill. Rainpaw, from this day forward you will be known as Rainears, SunClan honors your kindness and your agility." Flowerpaw tensed, it was her turn. All of her friends had their new names, and now it was her turn. "And finally, Flowerpaw, from this day forward you will be known as Flowerpelt, SunClan honors your dedication and patience." Flowerpelt stepped forward, taking in her new name, she licked Foxstar's shoulder and felt his nose against her forehead.

Foxstar stepped back, looking over all six apprentices with joy in his eyes. "SunClan welcomes you all as full warriors of SunClan!"

"Tigertail! Bramblepelt! Thornpelt! Crowfur! Rainears! Flowerpelt!" The cats of SunClan cheered their brand new warriors.

"Before I call this meeting to a close I want to point out that we now have no apprentices, with the exception of Honeywing so I want all warriors helping out with duties around camp until we have some more apprentices." Foxstar spoke and dismissed the Clan.

Flowerpelt whirled around and ran to her family who greeted her with cheerful mews and purrs. "Congratulations!" Stormwind purred loudly, rubbing up against her sister.

"We're so proud of you." Stonewhisker brushed his tail across her shoulders. "You've earned this, Flowerpelt."

"Thank you." Emotions welled up inside Flowerpelt, she was so lucky to have such supportive parents. She looked at Stormwind who was still lit up with excitement.

"Tonight you have your vigil, which isn't too bad." Stormwind explained, walking in circles around Flowerpelt. "And here soon is the gathering! We'll be announced as warriors together!"

"I'm excited." Flowerpelt purred.

Flowerpelt heard pawsteps behind her and turned to see Owlfoot standing behind her, his green eyes sparkling. "Congratulations, Flowerpelt." He purred her new name.

Flowerpelt stepped towards her former mentor. "I couldn't have done it without you. Thank you for being such a great mentor."

"Thank *you* for being such a great apprentice." Owlfoot purred, flicking his tail over her ears. "Now enjoy celebrating with your family, you also have a vigil to prepare for."

Flowerpelt watched Owlfoot walk away, grateful that she had such a wonderful mentor to train her. She looked back at her family, then at Hawktalon and Nightwing who looked just as proud for their kits. Flowerpelt let out a happy sigh, feeling incredibly content. She was finally a warrior.

Chapter 18

Flowerpelt opened her eyes, hearing the slight fall of rain outside the warrior's den. She lifted her head, the early morning light peeking into the den. She felt a slight chill and shivered. The warrior's den was completely full with the addition of six new warriors. Flowerpelt and the other most recent warriors had to sleep near the entrance. It wasn't necessarily comfortable and wouldn't feel that great in leaf-bare, but Flowerpelt was just grateful to be in the warrior's den.

She looked around the warrior's den, noticing that Thornpelt, Jayflight, Briarheart, Leafwhisker and Moonfur were gone. *It's barely past dawn, they must've been the dawn patrol.* Flowerpelt thought and sat up, stretching in the minimal space she had, trying not to wake Stormwind or Crowfur who slept beside her. The air outside was crisp, newleaf was in bloom and the days were very beautiful. Next was greenleaf, Flowerpelt's favorite season.

Flowerpelt was incredibly excited for the day ahead, tonight was her first gathering as a warrior and Foxstar would be announcing all six of their new warriors. It would show how strong SunClan really was!

Flowerpelt joined a hunting patrol with Sunstream, Flintstripe and Brightclaw and managed to catch two squirrels while her companions each caught quite a bit of prey. She was incredibly grateful for the season of newleaf.

SunClan reached the gathering hollow just after LichenClan arrived, Flowerpelt had been to gatherings before but this one already felt different. She was no longer an apprentice, she was a warrior! Flowerpelt walked confidently beside Stormwind, it was also her first gathering as a warrior. *I'm glad we at least get to share this together.* AshClan and MoonClan had already arrived and were talking amongst themselves, everything seemed peaceful.

Flowerpelt looked around, she didn't really make any friends during

the gathering but she wanted to see if she recognized any of them. She spotted a red-brown tom sitting with a golden brown she-cat and dark brown tom near the group of LichenClan cats. Judging by his crooked tail she assumed it was Jaggedtail from LichenClan, she remembered when he was named a warrior, but she couldn't remember the names of the other two.

The four leaders took their places on their trees, Flowerpelt couldn't notice that Birdstar looked incredibly annoyed. *I wonder what her problem is?* Flowerpelt wondered with a flick of her ears.

"I'd like to start this gathering if the rest of you don't mind." Foxstar mewed, he looked incredibly eager to show of their new warriors. Flowerpelt held her head high, she felt a happy purr from Stormwind beside her. The other leaders agreed and Foxstar stood up. "SunClan welcomes a bunch of new warriors to this gathering. Stormwind, Slateclaw, Cloudstorm, Flowerpelt, Thornpelt, Tigertail, Bramblepelt, Crowfur and Rainears!" Cheers rang out throughout the hollow, Flowerpelt held her head high. She spotted Tigertail and his siblings not too far away, looking equally as proud. "Our warriors den is crowded but we couldn't be happier."

"That's wonderful news." Goldenstar purred. "Mind if I go next?" Foxstar set down and let the AshClan leader continue. "AshClan also has two new warriors, please welcome Lilyclaw and Graypelt!" Flowerpelt's eyes traveled to a gray tabby she-cat and a large, solid gray tom both looking proud. "Our medicine cat apprentice has also received her full medicine cat name, Moonwhisker!"

Flowerpelt looked to the medicine cats, Honeywing was purring and Moonwhisker looked bashful, the two looked like friends. Moonwhisker always seemed like a very nice cat. Goldenstar sat down and Cloudstar stood up. "MoonClan also has two new warriors to announce, welcome Frostfire and Icestorm!" More cheers.

Now it was Birdstar's turn, the old leader stood up and shot a glare at Cloudstar. "LichenClan doesn't have any warriors to announce, but we do welcome two new apprentices, Cherrypaw and Applepaw!" The Clans cheered. "However," Birdstar's voice was sharp. "I've tried my best to keep this between us, but Cloudstar has

pushed my borders for the last time." There were murmurs of confusion between AshClan and SunClan, the cats of MoonClan tensed.

"For the past several moons Cloudstar has been crossing our borders, stealing prey and even invaded our camp!" Flowerpelt shared a worried glance with Stormwind, what was going on between those two.

"I'm simply following orders that Owlstar gave before he died." Cloudstar flicked her ears, looking incredibly smug. "You killed our warrior so you must pay."

"That was moons ago, Cloudstar!" Birdstar spat. "Honestly, I know we never forget our dead but you can't blame LichenClan forever. You tried stealing our herbs, that would've killed many of our cats!"

Cloudstar snorted. "I was taught that when a cat makes a mistake, that cat must be punished."

Birdstar bristled. "You blame the action of one of my warriors, I punished him! Move on!"

"You shouldn't have even made him a warrior!" Cloudstar hissed, claws digging into her branch.

"I have to agree with Birdstar," Goldenstar stood up, getting both leader's attention. "You can't blame LichenClan forever, all cats in this hollow know that any battle could be their last. We all took that oath when we became warriors. That we will defend the Clans, even at the cost of our lives." Cloudstar hissed. "The loss of a warrior is tragic but you can't hold grudges forever, and it doesn't give you an excuse to break the warrior code. You're no better than an apprentice throwing a fit, Cloudstar.

Flowerpelt was shocked at how blunt Goldenstar was, Cloudstar flattened her ears. "We're leaving!" With a lash of her tail, the white leader jumped down and led her Clan home. The rest of the Clans were left with an awkward silence.

"I'm sorry I had to bring that up," Birdstar apologized. "But I can't

take it anymore, the Clans need to know what MoonClan is doing."

"It's okay, Birdstar." Foxstar dipped his head. "I just hope that you two can come to some sort of an agreement before more blood is shed."

"Me too." Birdstar's eyes were hollow, she shook her head. "I suppose I should take my Clan home, may StarClan light your paths." She dipped her head and jumped down from her tree. When LichenClan was gone, Foxstar and Goldenstar both agreed to leave as well.

"Well that was certainly something." Flowerpelt mewed to Stormwind as they made their way home.

"No kidding." Stormwind snorted. "I had no idea that this was going on between the two of them. "I remember when that warrior died but I really didn't think they would hold *that* much of a grudge.

Flowerpelt nodded. "I guess I can understand, when another cat dies to another Clan it can't be easy. MoonClan was really upset, I'm sure SunClan would be too."

"Yeah, but we wouldn't steal prey from the Clan that did it." Stormwind pointed. Flowerpelt couldn't help but agreed. *Killing is against the warrior code, but so is stealing prey. Is it really right to respond to code breaking with more code breaking?*

Chapter 19

Flowerpelt walked along the border behind Nightwing who led the patrol, Fernsong, Rockfall, Brightclaw and Leafwhisker were also a part of the patrol. Flowerpelt walked in silence, taking in the warm afternoon. It was nearly greenleaf and it couldn't come soon enough, Flowerpelt wanted to sunbathe and hunt in the warm weather. Leafwhisker and Fernsong were having a conversation about Rustkit, Barkkit and Snakekit becoming apprentices, which would happen in the next few moons.

SunClan still didn't have any apprentices, but they would soon. They would get three apprentices very soon and Willowkit wasn't far behind them. Flowerpelt had also noticed how some cats were looking very close, namely Jayflight and Frostclaw. Flowerpelt wouldn't be surprised if Frostclaw moved into the nursery soon.

When the patrol reached the AshClan border, Flowerpelt noticed that there was a very strong scent, stronger than usual. She tensed up, last time this happened AshClan attacked. She looked to the rest of the patrol, they seemed to have scented it as well.

"Are AshClan testing the border again?" Leafwhisker questioned, Nightwing twitched her ears.

"I think they are." Nightwing sighed. "I swear those cats get bored and decide to fight us." She looked to the patrol. "I'm going to report this to Foxstar, we may have a fight on our paws."

Flowerpelt tensed, she didn't she had ever fought in a battle. The only one that took place was when she was an apprentice and Owlfoot sent her back to camp. She really didn't want to fight, but she would if she had to.

When they reached camp, Nightwing immediately went to where Foxstar was talking with Mallownose outside the SunTree. Flowerpelt went to Stormwind who was talking with Cloudstorm and Crowfur.

"How was the patrol?" Stormwind asked cheerfully when Flowerpelt sat down beside them.

"AshClan's scent was really strong, like they were taunting us." She flicked her tail. "Nightwing thinks they want to fight again."

"But why?" Crowfur tilted her head. "Things have been peaceful between us, why would they would want to start a fight."

"Because Goldenstar likes to fight." Cloudstorm snorted. "I fought the last time they attacked and she said it was just because she wanted to show that AshClan is strong, I guess peace means weakness to her."

Flowerpelt groaned, what a mousebrained concept. Peace meant friendly gatherings, no battles and happy lives. Why would it ever mean weakness? "I just hope that Goldenstar has a *tiny* bit of sense to her, she's gonna get a cat killed with that attitude." The other she-cats agreed. Flowerpelt continued her conversation with Stormwind, Crowfur and Cloudstorm. She couldn't help but notice how different being a warrior felt.

She had the freedoms to hang out with her friends, she could go on patrols and hunt as she pleased. Flowerpelt loved training under Owlfoot, but was glad she had a lot more freedoms.

The next day, Flowerpelt returned from hunting with a hefty caught of two squirrels and two mice. She deposited them on the fresh-kill pile and admired her work. It was a beautiful day and the cats of SunClan were relaxing. She looked over at the nursery and saw Fishtail laying on the ground while four kits ran over her, batting at her ears and tail. She just let them, purring the entire time.

Flowerpelt let out a purr herself, Fishtail loved kits. She may be stubborn towards apprentices and other warriors but Flowerpelt knew she had a huge weakness for the kits. Even with Snakekit but her ear she didn't complain. The queens were sharing tongues in the sun while Fishtail kept the kits busy, Flowerpelt felt her heart warm up at the sight of it.

Near the drinking pool, Leafwhisker and Briarheart were sharing

tongues while Sunstream and Honeywing had a conversation beside them. SunClan was happy, it was such a nice day and Flowerpelt was glad her Clan could enjoy the peace.

Then she heard a wail of pain.

The cats of SunClan were instantly on alarm and turned to face the camp entrance where they saw Briarheart standing in shock, he had a deep wound on his shoulder and his entire foreleg was covered in bright blood. "AshClan...attacking!" He breathed heavily, voice clearly twisted with pain. He collapsed on the floor and Honeywing was instantly bounding over to him.

"SunClan cats!" Flowerpelt and the rest of SunClan turned their gazes to Foxstar who was standing in front of the SunClan. "We must go to the AshClan border! Hurry!" Most of SunClan's warriors bolted out of camp, running as fast as they could. It wasn't long before they neared the border and Flowerpelt could hear the hissing and wails of battle.

Almost all of AshClan was there, overrunning a small SunClan border patrol. Frostclaw had a long wound down her hind leg and Flintstripe's ear was shredded, bleeding heavily. The rest of SunClan didn't hesitate as they swarmed the AshClan warriors.

Flowerpelt spotted a ginger she-cat named Hazelfern battering at Rainears's belly. Letting out a yowl, Flowerpelt jumped on the AshClan she-cat's back, digging her claws deep into her shoulders. Hazelfern let out a cry of alarm and lost her balance. Both Hazelfern and Flowerpelt tumbled to the ground. Flowerpelt got to her paws, hissing at Hazelfern.

Hazelfern jumped forward, slashing at her muzzle. Flowerpelt stumbled backwards, just barely avoiding her claws. With a hiss, Flowerpelt jumped forward, landing on Hazelfern's shoulders and clawing them. After a struggle, Hazelfern bucked Flowerpelt off, she hit her side hard. Slightly dazed, Flowerpelt struggled to get back up.

As Hazelfern went after her, Rainears kocked her to the side, now recovered. Her blue eyes blazes and she slashed at Hazelfern's head,

scratching the side of her face. Flowerpelt managed to get to her paws and faced Hazelfern alongside Rainears. Hazelfern hissed and turned, realizing she couldn't fight both she-cats. Flowerpelt looked to Rainears and gave her a nod, Rainears returned it and went to go help Sunstream fight Silverstripe, Sunstream had a wound on her leg and Silverstripe was bleeding from a wound on his back.

Flowerpelt heard a cry of pain from Foxstar, she spun around to see Foxstar fighting Goldenstar fiercely. Foxstar was bleeding heavily and clearly struggled, Flowerpelt ran towards her but was tackled by another cat. She felt teeth dig into her shoulders, pain ripped through her pelt as claws dug into it.

Flowerpelt hissed and bit what she could of her attacker, the blue-gray fur revealed it as Riverstorm. Flowerpelt's paws flailed, she dug them into Riverstorm's side, ripping through her fur. Riverstorm hissed and bit down hard into Flowerpelt's shoulder. Flowerpelt couldn't get out from under Riverstorm no matter how much she struggled.

The weight of Riverstorm was suddenly lifted, Flowerpelt looked up to see Stonewhisker throwing the young warrior off. "Are you okay?" He questioned, Flowerpelt struggled getting to her paws. He entire body hurt from wounds and being thrown around, she looked at the wound on her shoulder.

"I'm okay." She nodded, then looked to Foxstar. Goldenstar had him pinned, Stonewhisker noticed this too and ran over to the two leaders. Stonewhisker jumped onto Goldenstar's back and knocked her away, but Foxstar didn't get up. Feeling her chest tighten, Flowerpelt ran over to the SunClan leader, his eyes were closed and blood poured from a wound on his neck. He wasn't breathing. *Oh, StarClan no!* She panicked. *Was that his last life?*

A cry from Flowerpelt's father jerked her head towards where he and Goldenstar had been fighting. Another cat had joined the fight, it was Jayclaw. He jumped on Stonewhisker while Goldenstar regained her balance, she had a deep wound on her chest. Jayclaw had Stonewhisker pinned under him, Flowerpelt tried to run to her father to help but stopped dead in her tracks as Jayclaw sunk his teeth into Stonewhisker's throat.

Stonewhisker let out a cry that was cut off by a sickening choking noise, Flowerpelt's breath caught in her throat. "No!" She cried and ran over to the two warriors, throwing her body into Jayclaw's and knocking him away from Stonewhisker. She didn't stay to fight, she just ran to her father. "Stonewhisker!" She cried, his amber eyes were open wide but were glazed over. Her heart twisted, she spun around on Jayclaw. "You killed him!" Her eyes went to Goldenstar who looked somewhat alarmed. "And *you* killed my leader!" Flowerpelt's legs gave out, her world was spinning. *This isn't happening. This can't be happening!*

She fell down beside Stonewhisker's unmoving body, trembling. Suddenly she was a kit again, the forest was too big, too scary. She buried her nose into Stonewhisker's gray fur, let out another cry.

"Goldenstar." Flowerpelt heard a deep voice, she looked up to see Foxstar standing up, his eyes were exhausted but his wound was closed. It wasn't his last life. The ginger leader stepped towards Goldenstar. "Have you proven your point? Leave our territory." He growled.

"You're right, Foxstar." Goldenstar narrowed her eyes, not even looking guilty. Anger boiled inside of Flowerpelt, but she held her tongue, just burying her nose in Stonewhisker's fur once more. "AshClan! We're leaving!" The sounds of battle died down, leaving an uncomfortable silence. Flowerpelt swear she could hear her heart breaking. *What are Stormwind and Dovewish going to think?*

"Flowerpelt." She heard Foxstar's gentle voice beside her ear, she didn't look up. "I'm so sorry that your father had to die." *He didn't* have *to die.* She dug her claws into the ground. *He shouldn't have died.* "Let's go, we need to get his body back to camp."

Flowerpelt struggled to stand, her legs trembled as she did. Foxstar called over Rockfall who was nearby. He looked at Stonewhisker's body, dropping his head. "Help me carry him back." Foxstar told the warrior and Rockfall agreed. *I have to tell my sister and mother.* Flowerpelt looked through the group of cats, Stormwind was talking to Alderfang, she was barely wounded. Flowerpelt let out a sigh and slowly padded up to her sister.

"Flowerpelt!" Stormwind bounded over to her. "I'm glad you're okay!" he blue eyes scanned over Flowerpelt's body, looking for wounds. "That shoulder wound looks kind of bad." Flowerpelt didn't respond, she kept her eyes cast on the ground. "What's wrong?" Stormwind's ears went back slightly.

"Stonewhisker is dead." The words didn't feel real, she looked up at Stormwind whose blue eyes were wide and full of pain.

"What?" She spoke in disbelief. "H-How?"

"Jayclaw killed him after Goldenstar took one of Foxstar's lives." Flowerpelt felt exhausted. Stormwind let out a whimper, then pressed against Flowerpelt. Flowerpelt buried her face into Stormwind's silver fur and Stormwind did the same to her. "What do we do now?" Flowerpelt's voice trembled, she felt broken.

Chapter 20

SunClan reached their camp after a long, tiring walk back through the forest. Flowerpelt walked beside Stormwind, dragging her paws. All cats who had been involved in the battle knew of Stonewhisker's death, but Dovewish had been one of the cats who stayed behind to guard the camp. Flowerpelt didn't want to see the look on her mother's face as she told her that Stonewhisker was dead. Stonewhisker was the reason that Dovewish was even a member of SunClan, what would she think?

The Clan trudged into camp, the worst of the wounded went directly to Feathernose and Honeywing who had been preparing their herbs. Flowerpelt's eyes scanned the camp for Dovewish, she wanted to tell her mother before she saw Stonewhisker's body. Dovewish was outside the nursery, speaking with a very frightened Marshpelt.

"We need to tell her." Stormwind mewed, nudging Flowerpelt. She sighed and nodded in agreement. They approached Dovewish who turned around when they got closer. Her eyes filled with relief when she saw her two daughters.

"I'm glad you two are okay!" Dovewish's eyes glowed, Flowerpelt looked at Stormwind, feeling her heart break once again. "What's wrong?" Her voice faltered.

When Flowerpelt failed to reply, Stormwind stepped forward. "Stonewhisker is dead." Flowerpelt could see the expression on her mother's face shift, her eyes widened and her ears flattened.

"What?" Her voice cracked, through her eyes, Flowerpelt could see her mother's heart breaking. Dovewish sat down, staring at the ground in shock. Flowerpelt and Stormwind sat on either side of their mother, pressing close against her. *This is all Goldenstar's fault.* Flowerpelt thought. *It's her fault that Stonewhisker is dead, it's her fault that we're all in pain.* She pressed her muzzle into Dovewish's shoulder, she could feel her mother's body trembling. For a

moment, Flowerpelt was back in the nursery. She and Stormwind cuddling into their mother, she could feel her love very intensely. Only this time, Stonewhisker wouldn't be coming to check on them.

He wouldn't ever tell them how hunting was, how the patrol went, how much he loved them. Flowerpelt's heart twisted and twisted, on the verge of shattering into pieces. *Why did StarClan let this happen?* She questioned, opening her eyes and looking up at the sky that was slowly turning to night. *Why would StarClan let a SunClan warrior die in such a senseless fight?* Flowerpelt dropped her head once more. There was no reason that Stonewhisker had to die.

After Stonewhisker's vigil, Flowerpelt watched as Fishtail, Flintstripe and Alderfang carried away his body to be buried. Her entire body hurt, inside and out. Feathernose has treated her wounds, but no herb in the forest could heal the broken hearts of her, her sister or her mother. Dovewish had been given herbs for shock and went to sleep. Flowerpelt wasn't sure if she'd be able to sleep, everytime she closed her eyes she saw the look in Stonewhisker's eyes as Jayclaw killed him.

Flowerpelt ripped at the ground under her paws, her claws tearing at the grass. She would especially never forgive the heartless warrior that murdered her father. Flowerpelt took a deep breath, trying to calm herself, it didn't work. Behind her, Stormwind approached. Her blue eyes were glossy and exhausted. "I'm going to go get some sleep, Flowerpelt." Flowerpelt could hear the strain in her voice, it pained her to hear her sister in such a state. Last time Stormwind had been this upset was when she lost Firetail, even this seemed worse. "You should rest too."

"I can't right now, Stormwind." Flowerpelt was surprised at how her own voice sounded. It was dry, speaking hurt. "I promise I will soon." Stormwind stepped forward, pressing her muzzle against Flowerpelt's cheek.

"Please do." She mewed desperately, her voice just above a whisper. "I love you, Flowerpelt." Her voice cracked, as if she was on the verge of breaking down once more.

"I love you too." Flowerpelt watched her sister walk away,

Stormwind dragged her paws and tail. How Stormwind looked was how she felt, the pain inside of her was worse than what any wound could bring. How could she continue living with this pain? Would it ever go away? Part of her didn't want it to go away, she never wanted to forget about Stonewhisker, but there was no way she could focus on her warrior duties like this. Flowerpelt dropped her head and let out a long, painful sigh.

"Flowerpelt?" A nervous voice beside her spoke. She looked up to see Thornpelt standing beside her. What did he want? Suddenly on edge, Flowerpelt narrowed her eyes slightly. Last time they had spoken Thornpelt had told her that her mother would never stop being a kittypet.

"What do you want, Thornpelt?" She asked, not even trying to hide the hostility in her voice. *If he says anything about my mother being a kittypet again I'll claw his ears off.* She flicked her tail.

"Can I talk to you?" He questioned, gaze shifting awkwardly.

Flowerpelt was hesitant, but let out a sigh. "Sure."

"Let's go by the moss hollow." Thornpelt turned and started leading Flowerpelt out of camp. She wasn't sure why they couldn't just talk outside of camp, but she followed anyway. When they reached the moss hollow he turned, amber eyes looking incredibly nervous.
"Look," He began, shuffling his paws like am embarrassed apprentice. "I'm sorry about what I said a while back, about your mother." Flowerpelt twitched her ears, she wasn't sure what to expect from this apology.
"I was just blinded by what Falconclaw was telling me, I really don't believe that you, your sister or your mother aren't great warriors. I saw both you and Stormwind during the fight and you're both incredibly talented fighters." Thornpelt kept avoiding her gaze. "I guess what I'm trying to say is I'm sorry." He looked up, Flowerpelt saw genuine guilt his amber eyes.

She thought for a moment, what Thornpelt had said about Dovewish had really upset her, but if he was trying to make amends, surely she should forgive him? Flowerpelt had never really judged Thornpelt to be a cat like Falconclaw. With the loss of her

father she really just wanted a friend, she had Stormwind but she wanted someone to be close to that wasn't her family. She didn't need any enemies. Flowerpelt closed her eyes and took a deep breath. "I forgive you, Thornpelt." His ears perked up as if he was surprised.

"Really?"

Flowerpelt gave a small nod. "Really." She stepped forward, brushing her cheek against his, somewhat of a peace offering. "You've always been one of my best friends, and I don't want to lose you."

She heard a purr from Thornpelt. "I'm glad, because you're one of my best friends too." They met each other's gazes, Flowerpelt purred loudly. The two of them walked back to camp, as they neared the back entrance pain rushed through Flowerpelt's body. *I may have made amends with Thornpelt...but my father is still dead.* She dropped her head.

"You know," Thornpelt spoke up, looking at her. She lifted her head and met his eyes. "One thing that Falconclaw told me is that death is one of the most honorable things a warrior could do. Stonewhisker saved Foxstar from losing more than one life. He may be dead but he's not gone, Flowerpelt. If you ever become leader then he'll be there to give you one of your nine lives. He'll always be watching over you and your family."

Flowerpelt blinked, surprised at how much his words had actually soothed the pain in her heart. She was also a little shocked at him talking about her being leader. "You think I could be leader?"

Thornpelt's amber gaze was serious. "I do." His eyes lightened up a little. "But if you do, you have to promise me that you'll make me deputy."

"You want to be leader?"

He nodded. "I want to serve my Clan, it's the only thing I want to do. I'll fight until I die to protect my Clanmates, if I'm leader then I can do that nine times."

Flowerpelt looked at Thornpelt closer, something seemed different about him. He seemed brighter, bolder and more mature. He had a brave gleam in his eyes that he didn't use to have. *He really could be a great leader.* Flowerpelt felt her heart race a little faster. "Well, if you become leader...then you have to make *me* deputy."

Thornpelt let out a small chuckle, he looked at her with glowing eyes. "It's a deal."

Chapter 21

The sun beat down on the cats of SunClan as they gathered below the SunTree. Greenleaf was in full swing and the days had become very hot. Flowerpelt sat beside Stormwind and Thornpelt as the Clan gathered for the ceremony. In the center of the cluster of cats sat Rustkit, Barkkit and Snakekit who were all about to become apprentices. SunClan was in dire need of apprentices, as these three would make fine warriors with some training. Marshpelt sat close to the SunTree, near her mate. Flowerpelt couldn't help but notice how thin Marshpelt looked. Her mottled brown pelt was dull, was she getting older?

Flowerpelt flicked her ears, hoping that Marshpelt didn't have some sort of sickness. She forced her attention away from Marshpelt and to the apprentices who eagerly awaited to receive their apprentice names.

"Today is a proud day for SunClan," Foxstar began, the apprentices squirmed in place but remained still. "By naming apprentices we show that we will remain strong for many moons to come." Foxstar looked down at the three apprentice, two of them being his sons, his green eyes shimmered with pride. "Rustkit, Barkkit and Snakekit. You have reached the age of six moons and are ready to become apprentices. Rustkit, from this day forward until you have earned your warrior name you will be known as Rustpaw. Your mentor will be Tigertail, he may be a young warrior but I know that he will be a wonderful mentor to you."

Flowerpelt watched as Tigertail stepped forward, touching noses with his new apprentices. Tigertail may be a moon younger than Flowerpelt, but he was always incredibly mature. *He'll be a great mentor.*

"Barkkit, from this day forward, until you have earned your warrior name, you will be known as Barkpaw. Your mentor will be Flintstripe. Flintstripe, you are a brave and courageous warrior and I trust you will teach all you known onto young Barkpaw."

Flintstripe and Barkpaw touched noses and left Snakekit in the center by himself, looking ready to explode with excitement. "Snakekit, from this day forward, until you have earned your warrior name, you will be known as Snakepaw. Your mentor will be Moonfur who I trust will teach you everything you need to know." Eagerly, Snakepaw touched noses with Moonfur and the two stepped off to the side.

"Rustpaw! Barkpaw! Snakepaw!" The cats of SunClan cheered for their three new apprentices. Flowerpelt felt a rush of joy, watching the three young cats with their mentors. Foxstar was right, naming apprentices was a proud day for SunClan. Greenleaf was here and Willowkit would be receiving her apprentice name in the next moon. Frostclaw had also moved to the nursery and would be having her kits in about a moon. In the two moons since Stonewhisker's death, SunClan was thriving.

Flowerpelt looked up towards the sky. *I hope you're proud of us, father.* She thought, letting out a happy sigh and enjoying the sunlight on her pelt.

"I hope we get apprentices soon." Stormwind pulled her attention away from the sky. "Maybe we'll be able to mentor Frostclaw's kits."

Flowerpelt shrugged. "That's still seven moons away." She stood up, stretching out. *Still.* Flowerpelt couldn't help but want the same thing, if she finished mentoring an apprentice that meant that she would be able to become deputy. She looked at Thornpelt who had gotten up and was now talking to Bramblepelt. They had remaind friends since their talk and the promise remaind.

"I'm bored." Stormwind nudged Flowerpelt. "Let's go hunting, we're wasting greenleaf." Flowerpelt nodded eagerly and followed her sister out of the camp. "Where should we go?"

Flowerpelt thought for a moment, she didn't want to go near AshClan territory, it was hard enough to patrols there. She may have accepted her father's death but it didn't mean that she was happy about going to the spot where he died.

"How about near the MoonClan border." Flowerpelt suggested,

Stormwind nodded in agreement and the two sisters headed towards the river. It was a beautiful day, the blue sky was clear of clouds and the sun was shining bright. Flowerpelt felt energy flowing through her veins, she loved this season.

It wasn't long before Flowerpelt spotted a plump squirrel nibbling on some seeds at the base of a tree. She dropped into a silent crouch and kept her green eyes focused on her prey. The squirrel was completely oblivious to the danger it was in. With a mighty leap, Flowerpelt's claws met the squirrel and she killed it cleanly.

After burying her catch, she continued where she found a mouse that she killed with ease. Flowerpelt had lost track of Stormwind, but she was sure her sister was just as focused on hunting as she was. Flowerpelt found and caught another squirrel but caught a strange scent. It smelled like cat, like SunClan even but it was kind of feint.

With her nose in the air, Flowerpelt followed the trail. Through the trees, not far from the river border with MoonClan, she spotted the dark tabby pelt of Falconclaw. She couldn't help but tense slightly. *Why is out here?*

"I know you're there Flowerpelt." His voice was somewhat hostile and took her a little by surprise., Flowerpelt stood up from her crouch and stepped into view. Falconclaw's dark amber eyes looked her over with some sort of dangerous intent. Flowerpelt swallowed her nerves and approached her Clanmate.

"Sorry." She dipped her head. "I caught a weird scent and followed it here, where I found you."

"I smelled it too." Falconclaw turned his head and gazed across the river, into MoonClan's territory.

"What are you two doing out here?" Flowerpelt turned her head back to Stormwind who was looking at the two of them with a tilted head.

"We smelled something strange so we followed it here." Flowerpelt explained, Falconclaw was looking at Stormwind with the same

look her had given Flowerpelt. She stepped forward, not wanting to be alone with him any longer. "How much prey did you catch?" She questioned her sister.

Stormwind, looking somewhat off put, turned to Flowerpelt. I caught three squirrels and a mouse. Her blue gaze darted to Falconclaw. "How about you?"

"Two squirrels and a mouse." Flowerpelt stepped in between her sister and Falonclaw. "Why don't we take them back to camp, I'm sure the queens and Willowkit would love some prey."

"See you in camp, Falconclaw." Stormwind called politely as the two of them made their way away from the MoonClan border. The dark tabby gave a single wave of his tail to show he heard her but didn't respond.

Once the two sisters were out of his hearing range, Stormwind ducked her head down. "That was weird, right? How he was acting and looking at us?"

Flowerpelt nodded. "It was weird, he's always looked at me like though." She looked over her shoulder, making sure Falconclaw wasn't behind her. *I shouldn't be this concerned about my own Clanmate.* She let out a small sigh. *It's probably just in my head.* She wanted to enjoy greenleaf, not worry about what Falconclaw thought about her and Stormwind. "Let's just go home."

Once back in camp, Flowerpelt and Stormwind took two of their squirrels to Rowanfall and Frostclaw who were both very grateful. The sun was starting to set over the forest and SunClan was relaxing. Flowerpelt shared some prey with her sister and mother, enjoying the cool night after such a hot day. Dovewish had struggled, but she was slowly coping with the loss of Stonewhisker as were Flowerpelt and Stormwind. She knew that some cats though that after Stonewhisker's death Dovewish would return to her kittypet life, but Flowerpelt knew her mother better than that. *She loves us, she would never leave her kits behind. And she loves behind a warrior, I know she does.*

As the night settled down, Flowerpelt looked over SunClan camp.

The three apprentices were chatting eagerly outside the apprentice den about their first day over prey. Frostclaw and Rowanfall were playing with Willowkit outside the nursery. Flowerpelt wondered if Willowkit had any memories of Birchkit and Nutkit. They had been so young when they died that they never really had a life to live.

Willowkit seemed happy and was very excited to become an apprentice and soon the Clan would have even more kits. Flowerpelt wondered what it was like having kits, having to live in the nursery for eight moons and be unable to hunt or go on patrols. She would hate being stuck in the nursery, but then again she might love having kits of her own. Rowanfall certainly looked happy, and both Frostclaw and Jayflight were incredibly happy to have their kits.

That's not really something I can think about right now. Flowerpelt thought. *I'm young and I have dreams to follow.* She took a deep breath. *I want to be leader.*

Chapter 22

SunClan was thriving in greenleaf. Even though the season would be ending in about a moon, SunClan had used the season the best they could. The fresh-kill pile was full of prey and the cats were happy. Willowpaw was now an apprentice with Jayflight as her mentor and Frostclaw had given birth to two very healthy she-cats, Icekit and Snowkit. Tonight was the gathering and Flowerpelt was incredibly excited to show how strong SunClan had been doing the past moon.

Flowerpelt also knew that they would have more kits soon enough, Briarheart and Fernsong were closer than ever and the entire Clan knew that Owlfoot and Moonfur were mates now. Flowerpelt was glad that Owlfoot was able to find happiness after the death of his first mate, Firetail. Sandfoot and Applespots also seemed to be incredibly happy for their father. Flowerpelt also couldn't help but notice how close Tigertail and Sunstream had been lately, they shared prey all the time and looked at each other with loving eyes.

Flowerpelt hoped that the nursery would be crawling with kits soon, they had four apprentices now and would have more in six moons. Flowerpelt really wanted to be mentor to either Icekit and Snowkit. Tigertail told her how enriching it was to be a mentor and she wanted to experience it herself.

With all the kits and mates there were, Flowerpelt had once again began wondering about if she would ever have kits. *That requires a mate first.* She thought, and it wasn't something that she was super looking forward to. Kits would be nice, but Flowerpelt wanted to be leader and female leaders usually didn't have kits. *Goldenstar had kits...* A thought intruded into her mind. Flowerpelt shook her head, *It's not the time to think about kits!*

"Hey, Flowerpelt!" A familiar voice called her name, Flowerpelt turned her head to see Thornpelt who was standing with Alderfang, Moonfur, Snakepaw and Rockfall. "Come on patrol with us!" His amber eyes were shining, they seemed to light up the world around Flowerpelt. With a purr Flowerpelt bounded over to Thornpelt,

walking by his side as they went on patrol together. *I don't need a mate. I have Thornpelt.* She thought joyfully. *What if Thornpelt was your mate.* Flowerpelt stopped in her tracks, pelt burning and her heart suddenly racing.

"You alright?" Thornpelt looked after his shoulder at her.

Flowerpelt shook away all of her thoughts. "Just fine! Let's go!" Ignoring her own thoughts, Flowerpelt continued on the patrol, just wanting to enjoy the present without focusing too hard on her future.

The gathering hollow was full with cats, which was to be expected on such a beautiful, greenleaf. Flowerpelt walked alongside her sister and mother as SunClan settled in. Flowerpelt spotted Goldenstar talking closely with Cloudstar and Birdstar. It had been a while since Birdstar and Cloudstar had their fight during the gathering, Flowerpelt wondered if LichenClan and MoonClan were still fighting.

She noticed a MoonClan she-cat named Whiteriver talking with a LichenClan she-cat named Fawnsky. Maybe LichenClan and MoonClan had finally found peace, Flowerpelt hoped that they did.

The Clans settled down and the leader's began speaking. Cloudstar was the first to go. "MoonClan is proud to welcome one of our cats back after being missing for a few moons and he has earned his warrior name, Crowsky!" Flowerpelt blinked. *Missing?* Where had he been? Flowerpelt noticed a black tom with several white markings sitting beside a silver tabby she-cat, he was older than Flowerpelt and he had just received his warrior name? He must've been gone for a long time. "We also welcome two new apprentice, Tawnypaw and Smallpaw!" Two apprentice, a tortoiseshell and a black tabby held their heads high. The rest of the Clans cheered and Cloudstar sat down, letting Foxstar go next.

Flowerpelt held her head high, she always loved sharing great news from SunClan. "Prey is running exceptionally well this season," The ginger leader began. "And we welcome two new kits in the nursery as well as new apprentice, please welcome Willowpaw!" Willowpaw hadn't come to this gathering, but Flowerpelt could see Alderfang

and Rowanfall purring with delight.

Next was Goldenstar, Flowerpelt still didn't like the AshClan leader very much after causing the death of Stonewhisker, but she held her claws. "AshClan also welcomes new kits, Batkit, Crowkit, Nightkit and Dustkit!" More cheers followed Goldenstar's news, even from SunClan.

Finally, it was Birdstar's turn. "We are proud to announce our new warrior, Cherrypool! Prey is plentiful and LichenClan is thriving." There were cheers and the leaders got down from their trees so the Clans could talk.

Flowerpelt wasn't sure who to talk to, she really didn't have many friends from the other Clans. She spotted the LichenClan warrior Jaggedtail going up to the new MoonClan warrior, Crowsky. Crowsky looked incredibly awkward, Flowerpelt wondered if they knew each other. The AshClan warrior Echoheart was talking to MoonClan's Cedarclaw while his sister Amberfrost glared from a few taillengths away.

She didn't know what was going in between them and didn't want to try and figure it out. What she wanted to do was talk to someone new. Flowerpelt saw two AshClan warriors, Riverstorm and Lionpelt talking together. She didn't want to hate AshClan forever, so she took a deep breath and approached the two of them. "Hello." She greeted kindly.

Riverstorm and Lionpelt turned to look at her with curiosity. "Hi there." Lionpelt dipped his head in return.

"Flowerpelt, right? Of SunClan?" Riverstorm asked. Flowerpelt nodded. "It's nice to meet you." *Both these cats seem pretty nice.*

"How are you two?" Flowerpelt asked, staying kind.

"Good." It was Riverstorm who replied. "Greenleaf has been kind to us."

"Same here, congratulations on having kits in your Clan."

"You too." Lionpelt purred. "She's hoping to mentor one of them."

He motioned towards Riverstorm who seemed slightly flustered.

"Not all of us can get apprentices right after we become warriors." She flicked her tail, but Flowerpelt could see the playfulness in her eyes.

"Don't worry," Flowerpelt assured with a kind purr. "I'm hoping to mentor one of the kits in our nursery right now. Riverstorm's eyes turned soft. The three cats shared a long conversation talking about mentoring, Flowerpelt was surprised at how much she had in common with Riverstorm. However, Riverstorm seemed a bit more ambitious and bold than Flowerpelt, but she was a very kind cat as was Lionpelt.

When SunClan returned to their own territory, Flowerpelt settled into her nest, eager for a long night of sleep. The gathering was always a long night, but she knew that greenleaf wouldn't last much longer. They had about a moon left of perfect, warm weather before leaf-fall and eventually leaf-bare set in. *I can't worry about that.* She closed her, listening to the gentle breathing of her fellow Clanmates. *I worry too much about the future, I need to focus on now. If I do that, I don't have to panic about what the future holds.* With her head in order, Flowerpelt quickly fell into a gentle sleep.

Chapter 23

"We welcome you all as full warriors of SunClan!" Foxstar looked down at the four new warriors proudly, two of which were his own sons.

"Barkfang! Rustpelt! Willownose! Snakewhisker!" The Clans cheered, including Flowerpelt who was standing beside Thornpelt. Each of the new warriors parents and mentors were glowing with pride. Flowerpelt remembered how she felt when she became a warrior, it was a feeling that she would never forget.

"Our apprentice den is empty again." Thornpelt said once the ceremony had died down. "But we're no longer the youngest warriors so all those duties won't fall onto us."

"It won't be empty for long." Flowerpelt nudged her friend playfully, purring as well. "Icekit and Snowkit will be apprenticed next moon. Blazekit is barely a moon old but he'll probably be apprenticed before they're warriors. Then there's Moonfur's kits..." Flowerpelt looked towards the nursery. Blazekit was the newest member of SunClan, born to Fernsong and Briarheart. He was golden brown with striking, black tabby stripes. Moonfur had also moved into the nursery with Owlfoot's kits as Flowerpelt had predicted, they would be born soon.

"Do you think Foxstar will make you and Stormwind the mentors of Icekit and Snowkit?" Thornpelt questioned.

"I hope so." Flowerpelt sighed. "I've been kind of hinting at it," She flicked her tail. "I really want to mentor Icekit and I know Stormwind wants to mentor Snowkit."

"I can't imagine how hunting is going to be for those two. Their pelts are pure white."

Flowerpelt shrugged. "My pelt is pretty light, we'll help them out. They have the makings of great warriors." She looked at Icekit and

Snowkit who wrestled playfully together. They were getting pretty big and were almost identical except for Snowkit's darker eyes and longer fur. *Would it be weird if I went to Foxstar directly and asked to be Icekit's mentor?*

"Let's not sit around wasting daylight." Thornpelt mewed. "We should see if we can't get on a hunting patrol, it's nearly leaf-bare." Flowerpelt nodded, the time had just flew by. Before Flowerpelt knew it the forest was losing its leaves and the days were getting colder. Honeywing and Featherfall were stocking up on herbs while the warriors were stocking up on prey.

Flowerpelt couldn't believe how long it had been since Firetail, Nutkit and Birchkit died. So much had happened between the last leaf-bare and the upcoming one. Would they lose any cats this season? She prayed to StarClan that they wouldn't. *Please, Stonewhisker.* Flowerpelt looked up at the crisp, sunhigh sky. *Please don't take any cats from us.* When talking to StarClan, Flowerpelt often found herself talking to Stonewhisker directly. She missed her father, somedays were worse than others but talking him in the way that she did helped her cope.

Flowerpelt and Thornpelt managed to get on a hunting patrol with Leafwhisker, Owlfoot and Flintstripe. They headed towards the river and Flowerpelt walked beside her former mentor, they hadn't done as much talking as Flowerpelt wished. "Are you excited for your kits?" Flowerpelt asked Owlfoot as they made their way out of the camp.

"I really am." Owlfoot purred. "I was a little worried about taking a mate after Firetail died, but I know she wants me to be happy and Moonfur is a wonderful she-cat." Owlfoot's eyes sparkled. Flowerpelt could hardly believe this was the same cat she saw so long ago, torn apart by the death of his mate. "Applespots and Sandfoot are incredibly supportive, they're excited to meet their littermates."

"I'm excited to meet them too." Flowerpelt purred. "If they're anything like you they'll be great warriors."

Owlfoot chuckled. "What about you?"

Flowerpelt tilted her head. "What about me, what?"

"You and Thornpelt have been really close lately. The entire Clan is wondering when you two are going to have kits."

Flowerpelt was pretty sure her pelt caught fire, she looked at her paws. "Oh, oh, no that's--" She stammered, suddenly her throat was dry. "Thornpelt and I aren't--I don't want kits right now."

Owlfoot laughed, Flowerpelt checked to make sure that Thornpelt hadn't overheard the conversation. He was too busy talking to Leafwhisker. She sighed with relief. "Well, sorry to bring it up." He flicked his tail over her ears like he did when she was an apprentice. Flowerpelt was still trying to calm herself down.

"It's just--" She still struggled to speak. "I don't know if I'll ever want kits." She lowered her voice. "I honestly want to be leader someday."

Owlfoot brushed up against her. "When you passed your warrior assessment I told you that you would be a great leader and I still think that. I hope that one day you could be leader, I know you can."

Feeling more relaxed, Flowerpelt looked at her mentor with gratitude. He had always encouraged her, even when she injured herself and fell behind on her training he was always pushing her to do more. *I wouldn't be the warrior I am today without him.*

The patrol hunted the best they could, but the weather was chilly and prey wasn't very easy to come by. Flowerpelt managed to catch a squirrel and a shrew but not much else, luckily the patrol together caught a decent amount of prey to take back to camp and there would be another patrol before the end of the day.

Flowerpelt deposited her fresh-kill on the pile and located her sister who was talking with Snakewhisker, Barkfang and Cloudstorm. "Hey there." Flowerpelt called to the group of cats.

"How was hunting?" Stormwind questioned in return.

Flowerpelt shrugged. "Could've been better, but we caught a decent

amount." She sat down next to Stormwind. She suppressed a shiver, the day was getting colder as the sun went down. "You four are going to have a rough vigil tonight." Flowerpelt told Snakewhisker and Barkfang.

"Don't remind me." Barkfang licked a paw. "At least it's not in the dead of leaf-bare."

"Last leaf-bare we were just kits." Snakewhisker added. "We had our mothers to keep us warm, now we just have each other."

"We'll survive." Barkfang stretched out. "But," He continued. "We won't be moving from the apprentice den just yet, the warriors den is too full." Flowerpelt nodded, the warriors den was quite crowded.

"Foxstar said he would put some warriors on making it bigger, we just have a lot of warriors and not enough den." Snakewhisker mewed.

"Soon enough you'll be in the warriors den with the rest of us." Stormwind purred. "It's much more comfy in there than in the apprentice den, I'll be sure to get you a nice nest." Snakewhisker purred and he and Stormwind shared a look. Flowerpelt looked at her sister curiously. *Does she have a crush on Snakewhisker?* Flowerpelt purred at the thought, she wanted Stormwind to be happy and Snakewhisker was a very noble cat, he was a very talented warrior.

"We should find Rustpelt and Willownose so we can get some prey in us before our vigil." Barkfang stood up and nudged his friend. "It's gonna be a long night." Flowerpelt and Stormwind said goodbye to them and the two sisters were left by themselves.

"I hope leaf-bare is easy on us." Stormwind said, her voice suddenly quiet. Her blue eyes were looking up at the sky. Firetail was Stormwind's mentor and she had taken the loss quite hard.

"Me too." Flowerpelt pressed up against her sister's body. "But no matter what happens," Stormwind looked at her. "We'll all be okay."

Chapter 24

Snow fell lazily from the sky, getting caught in the fur of the SunClan warriors and sprinkling the ground, turning it white. The trees were bare and the air was cold. Flowerpelt hated the snow, hunting and patrols were cold especially in the morning. Hunting was getting poor and she knew that sickness was around the corner. She sat in camp with Stormwind, waiting for Mallownose to assign them to a patrol like she said she would.

Flowerpelt's eyes went to Cloudstorm and Barkfang who were sitting outside the nursery. It had been two moons since Barkfang, Rustpelt, Snakewhisker and Willownose all became warriors and Cloudstorm had recently moved to the nursery with Barkfang's kits. Moonfur had also given birth to Poppykit, Springkit and Lakekit. The Clan was overjoyed with the birth of new kits but Flowerpelt couldn't help but remember the last leaf-bare when two kits died. Poppykit, Springkit and Lakekit were so incredibly young, so was Blazekit. Icekit and Snowkit would be apprentices any day now.

Flowerpelt sighed and looked away, wishing she could shake the feeling of dread that came along with the cold season. She licked her fur, trying to keep warm. Behind her and Stormwind, Flowerpelt heard pawsteps crunching in the snow. They turned to see Foxstar, his ginger fur standing out like blood against the white snow. "Can I talk to you two?"

Flowerpelt shared a look with Stormwind who looked confused, but Flowerpelt was pretty sure she knew what would be going on. The two sisters agreed and stood up to follow their leader.

Once in the SunTree, Flowerpelt took a look around. She never really came in here, it was cozy and warm. "What did you want to talk to us about?" Flowerpelt questioned, though she was confident she already knew the answer.

"Today is Icekit and Snowkit's apprentice ceremony, I was wondering if the two of you would want to be their mentors?"

Foxstar looked over the two of them, his green eyes curious.

"We'd love to!" Stormwind exclaimed loudly nearly jumping off the ground. "I was hoping I'd be able to mentor Snowkit."

"I'd love to as well." Flowerpelt purred.

"Then it's decided. It's about sunhigh, I'm going to call the ceremony." Flowerpelt and Stormwind followed Foxstar out of his den and waited in the center of camp for him to call the ceremony. "Let all cats old enough to gather their own prey gather beneath the SunTree for a Clan meeting!" The Clan was instantly at attention, lifting their heads and turning to get up and head to the center of camp.

"This is so exciting!" Stormwind said to Flowerpelt, clearly getting ready to burst at the seams in pure joy. "We're finally going to be mentors!"

Flowerpelt nodded in agreement but her stomach twisted in knots. She had really been wanting an apprentice lately, but now that it was actually happening...she was worried. *What if I'm not a good mentor?* She questioned, claws scraping at the frozen ground. *Icekit's entire life as a warrior is dependent on me.* She tried to calm her racing heart, managing to keep her head steady.

Flowerpelt looked towards the nursery where Frostclaw was struggling to keep her daughters in check, both were incredibly eager to get started. Finally, Frostclaw let her kits go and sat down beside Jayflight as they waited for the ceremony to begin. Flowerpelt took a deep breath and looked to Foxstar as he began to speak.

"Today is a proud day for SunClan," He meowed, voice resonating. "By naming apprentices we show that we will remain strong for many moons to come. Icekit and Snowkit have reached the age of six moons and are ready to become apprenticed." Flowerpelt prepared herself, remembering the other apprentice ceremonies she had experienced, including her own. "Snowkit, from this day forward, until you have earned your warrior name you will be known as Snowpaw. Your mentor will be Stormwind, an incredibly

talented she-cat who I know will teach you all that you need."

Stormwind stood up and padded over to Snowpaw who eagerly touched noses with her new mentor, Flowerpelt couldn't help but purr. Snowtail and Snowpaw made their way back to Flowerpelt, Snowpaw's head held high. *My turn now.* Flowerpelt took a deep breath.

"Icekit, from this day forward, until you have earned your warrior name, you will be known as Icepaw. Your mentor will be Flowerpelt. Flowerpelt, I trust that you will pass all of the amazing skills you have learned onto young Icepaw." Flowerpelt stood up and walked to the center of camp where an excited Icepaw waited.

Flowerpelt leaned forward and touched noses with her new apprentices. It was a little too hard and the two painfully bumped muzzles. "Sorry!" Icepaw quickly apologized and stepped back, Flowerpelt felt her pelt burn. *Good move, Flowerpelt.* With her new apprentice at her side, Flowerpelt padded back to Stormwind and Snowpaw.

"Snowpaw! Icepaw! Snowpaw! Icepaw!" The Clans cheered their new apprentices. As the Clan returned to their normal duties, Icepaw and Snowpaw began bouncing around Stormwind and Flowerpelt with excitement.

"What are we gonna do first?" Snowpaw questioned, her deep blue eyes wide and filled with wonder. *The joys of being a young apprentice.* Flowerpelt thought with a purr.

"I was thinking a tour of the territory?" Stormwind looked to Flowerpelt, searching for approval. Flowerpelt thought it was a good idea and nodded.

"Sounds good, we can all go, but it's going to be cold so we may not see the whole territory today." Flowerpelt explained, but neither Snowpaw nor Icepaw seemed to mind. They just wanted to explore the territory. Stormwind and Flowerpelt led their apprentices out of the camp. Icepaw and Snowpaw's eyes were wide with wonder as they stepped out of the territory for the first time.

Flowerpelt recognized the look in their eyes, it was the same look she had when she had first seen the territory. When her paws itched to run and explore, she had wanted to see the whole forest. So much had changed since she became an apprentice, she had experienced loss and matured quite a bit. When she was an apprentice she just wanted to be the best warrior she could be, now she wanted to be leader someday. She wondered if Icepaw or Snowpaw ever wanted to be leader? Or any of the other warriors for that matter.

"We're getting close to the AshClan border." Stormwind spoke, pulling Flowerpelt out of her own thoughts. She felt a twinge of guilt, she should've been focusing on her apprentice and not her thoughts. "You can tell the border by this tree." When they reached the border Stormwind motioned to a large tree that marked the border with AshClan. "It's bigger than most."

"You should also be able to tell the border by scent." Flowerpelt added, taking a few pawsteps closer to the AshClan border. "Come here and tell me what you smell." She instructed both apprentices. Icepaw and Snowpaw stood beside Flowerpelt and sniffed the air around the border.

"It smells like pine needles and like SunClan but kind of different." Snowpaw explained, her blue eyes look to Stormwind for confirmation.

"That's the smell of AshClan. Their territory is majorly pine trees so it's not weird that you smell them." Stormwind replied with a slight purr. "The MoonClan border is much easier to notice since it's a river so you shouldn't ever cross it, and we don't share a border with LichenClan."

"So we'll only get to see LichenClan cats at gatherings?" Icepaw inquired, tilted her head slightly.

"Most of the time, yes." Flowerpelt answered. "Unless there's a battle with them, which is rare, or if Birdstar or Foxstar need to talk to one each other."

"We should continue." Stormwind mewed, urging the apprentices to

continue on. "Next is the river border that leads to the gathering hollow."

"When's the next gathering?" Snowpaw asked, looking in the distance towards the river. "I'm really excited to meet the other Clans."

Flowerpelt couldn't help but purr. "It should be soon, if both of you behave and do your best then we'll let you go."

"We will!" Icepaw pressed up against her sister, both sharing the same shimmering, bright eyes. "We promise! Don't we, Snowpaw?" She looked at Snowpaw.

"Of course!" Snowpaw boasted, her eyes beaming.

"Then you should be able to go." Stormwind purred. "Let's continue." Flowerpelt and Stormwind walking their apprentices along the river border and explained how gatherings work as well as the other leaders of the Clans and what to expect. Once they had walked the length of the river Flowerpelt noticed both apprentices were shivering and the snow had begun to fall faster.

"We should get back to camp." Flowerpelt mewed. "We don't want to risk sickness in an of us." *We've been in leaf-bare for a moon, but I still can't help but worry that sickness is just around the corner.* Once back in camp Icepaw and Snowpaw got some prey and hurried to huddle in the apprentice den. Barkfang and the others were still in there so it would be warm for them at least.

Stormwind and Flowerpelt settled down as well, it was freezing outside and Flowerpelt's paw pads burned. She curled up next to her sister, enjoying her warmth as well as the warmth of the others around her. As she drifted off to sleep, Flowerpelt heard a faint cough coming from one of the warriors in the den. No cat responded, and it didn't sound bad. *I hope it's nothing. Please, StarClan, let it be nothing.*

Chapter 25

Flowerpelt dropped her measly catch on the fresh kill pile. All she could find were two skinny mice. The fresh-kill pile itself was looking pretty pathetic, so was the entirety of SunClan for that matter. In the past half-moon Alderfang, Leafwhisker, Fishtail, Barkfang, Rainears and Springkit had all gotten sick, and what scared Flowerpelt more than anything: Dovewish had too.

One day her mother was fine, the next day not so much. She was coughing heavily and had a terrible fever. Feathernose said that it was definitely greencough. Flowerpelt could barely focus on anything, not hunting, not training Icepaw, she was terrified about her mother. Her stomach felt hollow and her heart ached with each passing moment. *What will Stormwind and I do if we lose Dovewish? I don't know if I could handle that...*

Then there was Springkit who was barely a moon old. Nutkit and Birchkit were her age when they died, would Springkit be able to fight off the infection? Fishtail was getting increasingly worse to the point where she could no longer leave her nest.

Behind Flowerpelt came coughing, she spun around to see who it came from. Her eyes went wide as she saw Foxstar outside the SunTree, hunched over coughing while Marshpelt watched in horror. Foxstar's entire body trembled as he coughed, Flowerpelt could see his ribs. *StarClan no...you can't take our leader from us too!*

"Go see, Feathernose!" Marshpelt cried, getting the attention of the rest of the Clan. "You're sick, Foxstar!"

"Marshpelt I--" He broke off with more coughing. "I'll be okay, I have lives to lose." He started coughing again, his legs shaking. They gave out from under him and the ginger leader fell to the ground in a flurry of snow.

"Foxstar!" Marshpelt cried and dropped down beside her mate.

"Feathernose!" Flowerpelt heard a panicked cry from Mallownose who was running to the medicine cat den. "Feathernose, Foxstar is dying!" In a flash, Feathernose was sprinting from his den towards their fallen leader. He kicked up white powder as he ran and skidded to a stop beside Foxstar where he dropped the herbs.

Feathernose tried shoving the herbs into Foxstar's mouth, but the leader wasn't moving. Flowerpelt's heart twisted into a hundred knots, her claws scraped at the ground. *This is the second life I've seen him lose...he says he has more to lose but how many more?*

Feathernose stopped working for a moment, letting out an exasperated sigh. "He's losing a life, I can't do anything to stop it." Marshpelt let out a wail and stumbled backwards.

"I tried Feathernose...I tried to get him to come see you..." She curled into a ball on the ground, making small weeping noises.

"I know, Marshpelt." Feathernose's voice was calm. He pushed a small herb toward Marshpelt. "Take this." Marshpelt hesitated but ate the herb. Feathernose looked at Mallownose who had followed him over. "Take Marshpelt into the SunTree to rest, but clean out Foxstar's infected moss. I have her some thyme for shock, she needs to rest."

Mallownose nodded and helped Marshpelt to her paws, the two she-cats made their way back into the SunTree. After they were gone Foxstar's body twitched. He slowly lifted his head and looked at Feathernose who instantly told him to eat a tiny supply of catmint.

"Next time." Feathernose's voice was no longer soft. "Tell me when you're sick, Foxstar. You may have more than one life but that doesn't mean you need to lose them all!" Foxstar ate the herbs without question.

"I'm sorry, Feathernose..." The leader's voice was dry. "I just--I hate watching my Clan in such a state, herbs need to be used on the ones who don't have more than one life. I can afford to die, the others can't."

Feathernose sighed. "Go to my den, Honeywing will make you a

nest. Eat the herbs I gave you and rest."

"Feathernose!" The cats of SunClan spun around to see Honeywing standing in the entrance. "Come quick! Springkit and Fishtail are dying!" Flowerpelt's heart dropped, she could see the same look in Feathernose's eyes. He stood up and without hesitation ran back to the medicine cat den.

Foxstar stood in the center of camp, looking horrified. There was an unbearable feeling of grief and sadness in the Clan, as if a thick fog had covered their camp. Flowerpelt couldn't move. *Why? Why is this happening to us?* Flowerpelt's mouth and throat were dry, why did this have to happen? How many more cats would StarClan take from them?

In the end, Feathernose and Honeywing were unable to save both Fishtail and Springkit. They both died and left the Clan in an even thicker fog. The entire Clan had stopped hunting to gather in close with their loved ones. Flowerpelt cuddled with Stormwind inside the warrior's den, her heart couldn't take this loss. She prayed to StarClan over and over to let her mother live, but she had a feeling deep down in her heart that Dovewish wasn't far behind Springkit and Fishtail.

"I don't want to sleep." Flowerpelt whimpered into Stormwind's ear. "I don't want to wake up and learn that our mother is dead."

"I know." Stormwind replied, her voice as soothing as honey to Flowerpelt. "I don't want to sleep either, but we have to stay strong. For our mother's sake and for our father's sake. If Dovewish dies then she needs to know that we be able to keep going."

Flowerpelt knew she was right, but she didn't want to admit it. She wanted to go back to being a kit in the nursery, where she didn't have to worry about battles or sickness, she could curl up next to her mother and play with her sister while Stonewhisker brought them prey and told them about his patrols. She didn't want to be a fully grown warrior anymore.

"Flowerpelt. Stormwind." A soft, exhausted voice spoke from the entrance of the warrior's den. Flowerpelt lifted her head and saw

Honeywing standing just outside the den. Flowerpelt's heart broke once more, she already knew what had happened by the look in Honeywing's eyes.

"Is she dead?" Stormwind asked, her voice low and heartbreaking.

"Not yet." Honeywing looked at her paws. "But Feathernose says she's close, he wants you two to come say goodbye to her before she's gone."

Flowerpelt didn't know if she could do that, could she really watch her mother die the same way she watched Stonewhisker die? *I can't let Stormwind deal with this alone.* Flowerpelt stood up, her body aching from the cold. "Let's go." She said to Stormwind who just have a half-hearted nod.

The two she-cats followed Honeywing to the medicine cat den. Feathernose was preparing Springkit's and Fishtail's body for the vigil. He would be preparing one more soon. Flowerpelt's eyes went to Dovewish. The once beautiful she-cat was now skinny, her pelt matted and dull. Her chest rose and fell slowly and rough, every so often she would let out a weak cough. Flowerpelt hated seeing her mother in such a state. For a moment she closed her eyes, picturing Dovewish as the beautiful, healthy warrior that Flowerpelt knew her as. With beautiful silver fur and shimmering blue eyes.

When Flowerpelt and Stormwind stepped closer, Dovewish's ears twitched and she opened her eyes, they were just as beautiful as Flowerpelt knew them to be. These were the eyes she looked to for guidance.

"My two beautiful daughters..." Dovewish's voice was dry and weak, but full of love. "I'm so proud of both of you...I'm sorry I have to leave you..."

"Don't be." Stormwind's voice cracked, she sat down beside Dovewish's nest and began rasping her tongue over Dovewish's ear.

"When I joined this Clan I never knew how much I would love it...your father showed me a whole new, beautiful world and then I had two amazing kits. I never once regretted leaving my life as a

kittypet behind." She looked up, her eyes going towards the sky, even though it was hidden by the roof of the medicine cat den.

"Your father told me about StarClan...I've heard so many things about them and yet part of me wondered if they really are real, especially after your father died." Dovewish closed her eyes. "But now," She opened them once more, looking not directly at Flowerpelt but beside her. "But now I see them..." Her expression was peaceful, her eyes full of so much love. "I'm ready, Stonewhisker." Her voice trailed off and her eyes closed one final time.

Dovewish's slow breathing came to a stop completely. Flowerpelt sat down, closing her eyes and trying to her best to wail like a kit. Stormwind sat down beside her, nuzzling her cheek. Flowerpelt's body trembled, she refused to open her eyes and see Dovewish's dead body. *Please,* She pleaded to StarClan. *Please don't let this be real, I need my mother!*

She couldn't stop her body from shaking, none of this felt real. "Flowerpelt?" Stormwind's voice sounded like it was so far away, muddled by the fog that surrounded her mind. Her head was dark and clogged, she could only think of her parent's two dead bodies. *This isn't real. This isn't real.*

"Flowerpelt." She felt a jab in her side. Flowerpelt opened her eyes, but the world was a blur. She couldn't focus on the cats around her. "Take this." A cat she assumed was Feathernose pushed her an herb, but her mind was still clouded. "She's in shock, Stormwind, she needs this." Flowerpelt managed to find and eat the herb, but nothing changed. *It's supposed to help me! I can't...* Her mind blurred, she could no longer think solid thoughts. Stormwind was helping her to her paws. She could tell she was walking through camp, but the world around her really didn't make any sense.

Flowerpelt laid down in her next, feeling the warmth of Stormwind beside her and finally the chaos in her mind started to slow down. Her body gave in to sleep and for a moment, Flowerpelt was back with her parents and sister. A happy kit, playing in the beautiful, greenleaf sun.

Chapter 26

The sun was shining bright. Flowerpelt padded through the lush forest, making sure that her moves were silent. Icepaw was easy to spot, the snow as gone and now her white pelt stood out against the green forest. Her apprentice was stalking a large squirrel that had no idea that Icepaw was near. The white she-cat leapt forward and killed the squirrel before it could even realize what was happening. *She's gonna make a wonderful warrior.* Flowerpelt purred, feeling a rush of pride for her apprentice, she had really come a long way.

Stormwind and Flowerpelt were currently holding an assessment for their apprentices, it wasn't their warrior assessments but those wouldn't be too far behind. Both Icepaw and Snowpaw had become very skilled hunters and fighters. Flowerpelt continued to follow her apprentice who had already caught a shrew, a vole and a blackbird before the squirrel. She wondered how well Snowpaw was doing.

After Icepaw caught a mouse, Flowerpelt decided that she had caught enough and decided to call the assessment to an end and retrieved Icepaw. "You did a wonderful job, Icepaw." Flowerpelt purred loudly, Icepaw held her head high and her blue eyes glimmered. "You are shaping up to be quite the warrior."

"Thank you." Icepaw held her head high. She had also become more confident in herself and her achievements. "It's hard hunting with my fur but I've made it work."

"I'm proud of you." Flowerpelt flicked her tail over Icepaw's ears. "Let's go find Snowpaw and Stormwind."

They found the two of them and Snowpaw had done just as good as Icepaw with two squirrels, two mice and a rabbit. Bringing back so much prey was good, SunClan was full of cats. It had been five moons since Dovewish, Fishtail and Springkit died and leaf-bare had ended. Leafwhisker and Alderfang had succumbed to their sickness later in the season and joined StarClan as well, but their families were slowly adjusting just as Flowerpelt, Stormwind and

the others who had lost family were.

Foxstar was fully recovered and the same, bold leader he normally was. Blazepaw, Poppypaw and Lakepaw had become apprentices to Frostclaw, Brightclaw and Flintstripe earlier in the moon and yesterday, Cloudstorm and Barkfang's kits, Windpaw and Berrypaw had become apprentices to Hawktalon and Tallfern.

The apprentice had gotten so full that they finally expanded the warriors den to make room for Rustpelt, Barkfang, Snakewhisker and Willownose. Both dens were full and Flowerpelt felt joy at the thought. SunClan was incredibly strong with so many powerful warriors. No new kits were on the way but she didn't know if SunClan had room for any more cats.

After such a bad leaf-bare and losing four cats, Flowerpelt and the rest of SunClan were grateful for an easy newleaf and plentiful greenleaf. Flowerpelt continued to miss her mother, but she knew that Dovewish was happy in StarClan with Stonewhisker and watching over their daughters with pride.

Since life had returned to a sense of normalcy, Flowerpelt had been trying to get on more patrols and spend more time with Thornpelt, but she had been so busy with Icepaw that she didn't have much time for a social life with Thornpelt. She knew that Thornpelt was hoping to get one of the many new apprentices, but they went to other cats and Flowerpelt could tell he was very upset about it.

Stormwind and Flowerpelt released their apprentice to have some prey and relax after their impressive assessment and Stormwind went to go spend some time with Snakewhisker. They didn't need to tell any cat that they were mates, Flowerpelt could see it in their eyes. Flowerpelt was incredibly happy for her sister, Snakewhisker had helped Stormwind cope with the loss of their mother and was there for her whenever she needed him.

Now that she didn't have much to do, Flowerpelt found Thornpelt, he was talking with Crowfur and Rainears over some prey. "Hi there." She purred to him. Thornpelt looked up, his amber eyes turning soft when he saw her.

"Hello." He swallowed a piece of squirrel. "How was Icepaw's assessment?" He questioned, his eyes going to Icepaw who was now talking with her sister and Blazepaw.

"Great, she's shaping up to be a wonderful warrior, Snowpaw too." Flowerpelt explained.

"Have you eaten?" Thornpelt nudged his squirrel towards her.

"Not since this morning." She had eaten before she took Icepaw out hunting, but she had to admit she was incredibly hungry. Flowerpelt sat down beside him, accepting his offer of squirrel. She leaned down to take a bite, very aware of the fact that their pelts were touching. It sent sparks throughout her body. She was also very conscious of the looks Rainears and Crowfur were giving them, but she ignore them as she took a bite of the squirrel.

"When do you think Icepaw and Snowpaw will be made warriors?" Thornpelt asked, also taking a bite of the prey.

"Anytime within the next moon. They're both great hunters and I know they will make fantastic warriors." Flowerpelt replied.

"I wonder when we'll get apprentices." Crowfur mewed with a yawn. "We've been warriors for long enough, Tigertail got his first apprentice moons ago. We should've gotten one of the newer apprentices."

"We'll get them when we're ready." Rainears mewed, her voice chipper. "Foxstar picks the cats he thinks will be best for the apprentices and we will get our turn soon."

"Not soon enough." Thornpelt grumbled and took a bite of his prey. "I know Tigertail is mature and all, but Snakewhisker and Rustpelt are gonna get apprentices before we do at this rate."

"Like I said," Rainears repeated, flicking her white ears. "We'll get them when Foxstar thinks that we will be able to effectively train an apprentice. You should enjoy the life you have as a warrior." Rainears stood up and stretched, finished with her prey. "Well, I have a patrol to get to, see you later!" With a kind flick of her tail,

Rainears bounded away to join her patrol.

"I gotta go too." Crowfur replied. "I'm going hunting with Nightwing, Moonfur and Fernson in a bit."

They left Thornpelt and Flowerpelt alone to finish their prey, Flowerpelt couldn't help but notice that Thornpelt was still clearly upset about not having an apprentice. "Don't worry." She nudged him kindly. "You'll get an apprentice soon, and I know that you'll do an amazing job mentoring them."
Thornpelt let out a snort. "Thanks, Flowerpelt." He nudged the remains of their squirrel with his paw. "I can't become deputy without an apprentice." He looked up with a playful spark in his eyes. "So tell Stormwind to hurry up and have Snakewhisker's kits already."

Flowerpelt laughed. "It's definitely going to happen sometime." There were three couples of cats that looked like they would be having kits soon, Stormwind and Snakewhisker were one of them. The others were Tigertail and Sunstream and Bramblepelt and Willownose. Both were Thornpelt's kin which wouldn't be made his apprentices. The exception to Falconclaw mentoring Thornpelt was that there weren't enough mentors, but now there was.

"You just have to be patient." Flowerpelt looked at Thornpelt who was staring at his paws still. "Plus," She added on, nudging him once more. Thornpelt looked up at her curiously. "Once Icepaw is a warrior then we can spend more time together until you get yours, you'd be surprised at how much time an apprentice takes up."

A purr sounded from deep in Thornpelt's throat, his eyes sparkled. "I'm glad I have you to spend time with." He nuzzled her cheek, Flowerpelt's entire body went stiff and heated up. "You're my favorite cat."

Chapter 27

"Snowtail! Icepetal! Snowtail! Icepetal!" The cats of SunClan cheered their newly named warriors. Flowerpelt watched, pride burning in her chest as she watched Snowtail and Icepetal run over to their parents in sheer joy about being made warriors. Both of them had done perfect on their warrior assessments and Flowerpelt and Stormwind couldn't deny them their warrior names.

I feel so proud of Icepetal. Flowerpelt thought, her chest feeling warm. *I can't imagine the pride that Frostclaw and Jayflight are feeling.* Flowerpelt watched the family, wondering what it felt like to watch kits turn into warriors. She tried to hide the thought but it didn't leave her mind.

Over the past moon Flowerpelt and Thornpelt had become much closer, they slept beside each other in the warrior's den and hunted together whenever they could. Whenever Flowerpelt was around him her heart fluttered and she felt like she could take on the forest. Much like with Stormwind and Snakewhisker, most cats in SunClan had assumed they were mates. Flowerpelt honestly didn't know if they were or if she wanted to be, she just loved being around him.

"Hey, Flowerpelt!" Flowerpelt heard an eager voice calling her name, she turned to see Tallfern and Berrypaw. Flowerpelt padded over to the two of them, Berrypaw looked excited.

"I know you just finished training an apprentice, but I was wondering if you wanted to come hunting with us by the AshClan border." Tallfern questioned. "I was hoping you would show her that bird hunting technique you taught Icepetal, I was never good at catching them."

"I'd love to." Flowerpelt purred, it was a beautiful day out and she already missed having an apprentice to train. She always had something to do while Icepetal was still training, helping with Berrypaw would help keep her busy.

With the excited apprentice in two, Flowerpelt and Tallfern headed into the forest. "There's a tree near the border that almost always has birds in it." Flowerpelt explained as they neared the border. "We should be able to easily find birds around it."

"Thanks for doing this." Tallfern said quietly, looking over her shoulder at Berrypaw. "Berrypaw is so full of energy, I can't keep up with her half the time. I'm getting too old for this." She let out a exasperated chuckled. "But she keeps me on my toes, I might retire after she becomes a warrior."

"Sounds like a good plan." Flowerpelt purred. "Will Flintstripe be joining you?"

"I hope so. He's older than me, Snakewhisker will be having his own kits soon and I want to relax. Let all these younger cats look out for the Clan, you know?"

Flowerpelt couldn't relate that well, she wasn't old at all, but she could understand the struggle of having an energetic apprentice. Icepetal was relatively calm, but Berrypaw was incredibly exuberant, it couldn't be easy.

Just as Flowerpelt predicted, there were several birds around the area where she had said there would be. "Listen to me, Berrypaw." Flowerpelt pulled the apprentice's attention. "When you're hunting with birds you have to be focused and careful." Berrypaw gave a determined nod and looked at a sparrow on the ground. "You have to get close, if you're not close enough then a bird could easily fly away. Even with how close you get, you should be prepared to give a big leap to catch them."

Berrypaw nodded, she appeared to have listened. Tallfern and Flowerpelt stepped back and let Berrypaw hunt. She dropped into a crouch and began stalking the sparrow. Her form was pretty good for only have been an apprentice for less than two moons, Tallfern had taught her well. Berrypaw neared the sparrow, less than a tail length behind it. Her tail brushed a shrub and the bird began to fly away.

Berrypaw let out a gasp and jumped upwards, her claws hooking

the sparrow's wing. Both she and the sparrow hit the ground, the white and brown apprentices landed on her stomach with a huff but she killed the sparrow.

"Not bad!" Tallfern praised and hurried over to apprentice to make sure she was alright. Berrypaw sat up with shimmering green eyes.

"I almost let it go but I bet it looked cool!" Flowerpelt held back a purr of amusement, it was certainly interesting seeing an apprentice flop to the ground on her belly with a bird in her claws, but prey was prey.

"It certainly did." Flowerpelt purred.

"Batpaw! Slow down!" Flowerpelt heard a familiar voice shout. The three SunClan cats turned to see Riverstorm chasing after a dark gray apprentice with a black belly and paws followed by a another gray tom with black paws and a brown tabby named Dustclaw.

Batpaw skidded to a halt and pointed with his paw at a buildup of moss and sticks in the river. "But it looks so cool! I wanna play on it."

Riverstorm looked at Batpaw with concern. "I don't know, it looks unsteady." She inspected the formation. It was then that Riverstorm noticed the SunClan cats. "Oh, hi there." She licked her chest in embarrassment. "Sorry about him, he's...energetic."

"It's quite alright." Tallfern purred and approached the border without crossing. "Berrypaw, here is energetic as well."

Riverstorm's gaze softened. "This is Batpaw, my apprentice, and that's Crowpaw, Dustclaw's apprentice."

"It's great to meet you!" Berrypaw ran up to the border as well, her green eyes as bright as the sun. "I'm learning how to hunt birds! Did you see my awesome catch?"

"I didn't." Batpaw's attention had turned to Berrypaw instead of the wood formation. "But I bet it was pretty cool! I caught a bird the other day." Flowerpelt watched, thoroughly entertained by the two apprentices, both Riverstorm and Dustclaw looked entertained as

well. *I like this, two Clans getting along with their apprentices.*

"What's going on here?" All the cats turned towards SunClan territory where Feathernose was standing with semi-confused look in his green eyes.

"We're just talking with Riverstorm, Dustclaw and their apprentices, Feathernose." Tallfern explained.

Feathernose shrugged. "I have no problem with it, I'm just here for some fennel which grows down here." He brushed past Tallfern and Flowerpelt to the river where he began picking some herbs.

"Riverstorm can I *please* play on that?" Batpaw urged his mentor, turning his attention back to to the moss and branch formation in the river. "I bet it will hold my weight."

"I don't know, Batpaw." She looked at it once more. "It's nearly on SunClan territory."

"This thing?" Feathernose was prodding the formation with his paw. "We don't own the river." He mewed. "Let me see..." The medicine cat stepped on the wood platform, it wobbled from the current but supported his weight, Flowerpelt could help but be worried about their medicine cat. "It seems to be steady, but it's up to your mentor." Feathernose jumped off, landing beside the river.

"I wanna play on it too!" Crowpaw added, running up beside Batpaw. "If it can hold Feathernose than it can for sure hold us!"

Dustclaw and Riverstorm shared a look. "Very well, Batpaw, just be careful!" Flowerpelt looked at the river, it was running kind of fast today, but they had a medicine cat nearby and plenty of warriors to pull the two apprentices out if they did fall in.

"Can I join them?" Berrypaw spun around to face Tallfern. "I'm even smaller than they are!"

Tallfern looked up at Riverstorm, would they allow their apprentices to play with a cat from SunClan. "I don't see why not." It was Riverstorm who replied. "Just because we're from two different Clans doesn't mean we have to be at each other's throats

all the time."

"Then off you go." Tallfern encouraged Berrypaw to go play with Batpaw and Crowpaw. She got on the pile of wood and moss and began jumping around and playing with the other two. While they played, Flowerpelt turned to Riverstorm.

"How is the prey running in AshClan?" She questioned politely.

"It's great." Riverstorm purred. Flowerpelt knew that AshClan had struggled during the last leaf-bare as well. Greencough had claimed the life of several cats including Goldenstar, the Clan was now lead by Ivystar. The same had happened to LichenClan with them now being lead by Jumpstar. "How about for SunClan?"

"Also great, prey is more than plentiful." Tallfern replied. "We have a den full of apprentices."

"That's always good to hear." Dustclaw added, sitting down comfortably beside Riverstorm. "Apprentices certainly bring a lot of joy to the Clan, especially energetic ones." He cast a glance at Batpaw.

"Tell me about it." Tallfern let out a laugh and rolled her eyes. "I can't keep up with Berrypaw, she has more energy than I ever did."

A cry split the air, all heads turned to the apprentices. The wood and moss under them gave way and all three fell into the water. Berrypaw's head slipped under the water and Batpaw struggled to stay afloat. Crowpaw dug his claws into a large piece of driftwood, managing to stay still.

The first cat to act was Feathernose, none of the others had a chance to move before Feathernose dove into the water. He vanished under the surface and pulled up Berrypaw who was unconscious. The silver medicine cat threw his body towards Batpaw, trying to keep him above the surface of the water but the AshClan apprentice went under.

The other warriors ran to the river with Tallfern and Flowerpelt crossing the AshClan border as Feathernose, Berrypaw and Batpaw

were swept away. Dustclaw helped Crowpaw out of the water, but the apprentice's terrifying ordeal was far from over. He called out to his brother who had yet to resurface.

Tallfern, despite her age, jumped clear to the other side of the river to try and catch up with Feathernose. The weight of Berrypaw and his long fur was clearly making him struggle. The river tugged and pulled at his fur, Flowerpelt's entire body trembled with panic. Her heart pounded as she sprinted after the warriors, but the river was moving too fast.

Suddenly, Feathernose and Berrypaw vanished beneath the surface. Riverstorm let out a cry of alarm and jumped into the river after them. Feeling even more panicked, Flowerpelt ran harder. Dustclaw was beside her, he grabbed a large branch in his teeth and did his best to run ahead. He jammed the branch into the river, it went straight across to the other side.

Tallfern went into the river next, both she and Riverstorm ducked under the surface. Flowerpelt and Dustclaw just watched in horror, both of them trying to keep the river steady. There was a splash and Tallfern's head broke the surface with Berrypaw's scruff in her teeth. *Where's Feathernose and Batpaw?* Flowerpelt scanned the surface of the river, Riverstorm's head surfaced with Batpaw in her teeth.

Both she-cats put the apprentices on the river bank and returned to find Feathernose. Flowerpelt and Dustclaw ran to the apprentices, neither of them were moving. *No!* Flowerpelt put her paws on Berrypaw's chest, trying to get the water out of her lungs but nothing happened. *Don't take her!* Flowerpelt pleaded. Dustclaw was doing the same thing to Batpaw with just as little results.

There was another splash as Tallfern and Riverstorm came up once more, using their claws to grip the branch that Dustclaw had placed. They were using their combined weight to support Feathernose's limp body. The two she-cats managed to climb out of the river, dropping Feathernose and falling down themselves, shivering and panting.

It didn't take long for Riverstorm and Tallfern to run to their apprentices, Tallfern placed her ear against Berrypaw's chest. "She's

not breathing..." Her voice trembled. "StarClan no!" She cried, falling down and burying her nose in Berrypaw's fur. "This can't be happening!"

"Batpaw..." Riverstorm whimpered, she had her head buried in Batpaw's fur as well. "This is all my fault...I never should've let you go on there...I'm so sorry..." Flowerpelt looked at Feathernose who still wasn't moving. Flowerpelt ran over to him, listening to his breathing, but hearing nothing.

"Berrypaw...Feathernose...Batpaw..." Riverstorm whimpered. "I'm so sorry...your apprentice and medicine cat are dead because of me!"

Tallfern stood up, facing the AshClan warrior. "It's not your fault, Riverstorm." Tallfern touched her nose to the blue-gray she-cats, her entire body trembling. "They were just being apprentices, Feathernose died trying to save them...it's not your fault." Riverstorm fell against the SunClan she-cat, wailing in pain over her dead apprentice.

Flowerpelt's heard felt as if it was shattering, just as it had when she lost her parents. *Feathernose has done so much for me. He took care of me when I hurt my leg...he's always been there for me. What is SunClan going to do without him?* She met Dustclaw's gaze, Crowpaw had his nose buried in his mentor's fur over the loss of his brother. *Poor Windpaw...StarClan...why do you keep taking cats from us?*

Dustclaw helped Crowpaw and Riverstorm back to AshClan territory, he promised he would share the news of Feathernose's heroic actions and that AshClan did not blame SunClan for the death of Batpaw. Flowerpelt promised him the same, that Riverstorm would not take the blame for Berrypaw's and Feathernose's deaths. Tallfern was clearly shaken by the death of her apprentice, but she put on a brave face and helped Flowerpelt carry both bodies back to SunClan camp.

When they reached camp, the first cat they saw was Brightclaw. His eyes rested on the two bodies. "What in the name of StarClan happened?" His eyes went wide with shock.

"It was an accident..." Flowerpelt felt exhausted, not only from

running but from having to watch three cats die. "I'll explain more later..."

Tallfern insisted she go and tell Berrypaw's family, she brought Cloudstorm, Barkfang and Windpaw to see Berrypaw one last time. Flowerpelt put it upon herself to tell Honeywing, she couldn't imagine what the medicine cat apprentice would think.

She approached the medicine cat den, inside Honeywing was organizing some balls of moss. She turned her head, looking at Flowerpelt with bright green eyes. "Hello, Flowerpelt. What can I do for you?"

"Honeywing." Flowerpelt's voice trembled. During her time in the medicine cat den she had formed a friendship with Honeywing as well as Feathernose. She really didn't want to share this news, she wanted to stop Berrypaw from ever going on that thing in the river. "There's been an accident."

Honeywing was instantly on alert. "What? Who's hurt?" She looked around frantically for herbs. *She's such a caring medicine cat, Feathernose will be so proud.*

"Honeywing," Flowerpelt stopped her, she looked confused and concerned now. "Berrypaw and Batpaw and Crowpaw of AshClan were playing on this wood formation on the river. They were having fun, and Feathernose was down there. He tested it to see if it was sturdy and it was. However...it wasn't as strong as we thought. All three apprentices fell in, Batpaw and Berrypaw died...and Feathernose died trying to save them."

Honeywing's eyes widened slightly, she sat down and stared at the ground. "Feathernose is...dead?"

"I'm so sorry, Honeywing." Flowerpelt pressed up against the golden she-cat, Honeywing fell against her and started sobbing gently.

"I--what if I'm not ready to be SunClan's only medicine cat?" Honeywing questioned, Flowerpelt wasn't sure if she was talking to her or not but she responded anyway.

"Honeywing, you are more than ready." Flowerpelt said gently. "Feathernose died saving cats, which is what he lived for. I've seen you work, you're an amazing medicine cat and I know he's proud of you, we all are."

Honeywing took a deep, shaky breath. "I know you're right I just...I've been his apprentice for so long...it's going to be so hard doing this without him." She straightened herself out slightly. "But I have to do my best, I will do everything I can to serve my Clan no matter how hard it is. I will be the best medicine cat SunClan could ever ask for, and I'll do it for Feathernose."

Chapter 28

Flowerpelt still couldn't look at the river in the same way. Everytime she did she saw Feathernose and the apprentices drowning. She hated it, she couldn't understand how MoonClan cats willingly swam in it when it claimed the life of three cats. It had been a moon since that happened and SunClan was struggling to adjust. Windpaw had been incredibly distraught over the death of her sister, but her parents supported her. Honeywing was also struggling as SunClan's only medicine cat, but just as she had said when Feathernose died, she was doing her best to be the best medicine cat she could be and all of SunClan were proud of her.

Flowerpelt hadn't seen Riverstorm since the accident happened, not even at the gathering a few days ago when the deaths of Batpaw, Berrypaw and Feathernose were announced. She really hoped that Riverstorm didn't completely blame herself for the death of the three cats, none of SunClan blamed her.

Tallfern had moved to elder's den like she said she would after Berrypaw became a warrior, since Berrypaw died she decided to move in sooner. She claimed that she really didn't feel like being a warrior anymore. The whole situation seemed to have aged Tallfern a whole ten moons, Flowerpelt didn't blame her.

Flowerpelt found herself having nightmares about the water, drowning or watching the ones she loved drown. She had seen so much death lately and she hated it. *Cats shouldn't be dying, especially apprentices.* She was on patrol with Thornpelt, Mallownose, Brightclaw and Poppypaw. They walked along the river and Flowerpelt made sure she was a good distance away from it.

It was calm today. *Why couldn't it have been like that when it killed three cats?* Flowerpelt lashed her tail and focused on the forest ahead of her. She did notice however, that Poppypaw seemed to be focused on something else entirely. Her green eyes were staring into the forest, she really didn't seem to care about the patrol.

Flowerpelt had overheard Brightclaw talking with Moonfur and Owlfoot about Poppypaw, how she wasn't trying very hard in training and was behind all the other apprentices in her duties. *What's going on with you, Poppypaw?* Flowerpelt wondered if she could talk to her, maybe the death of Berrypaw had shaken her up.

The patrol came to an end and Brightclaw sent Poppypaw to go take Tallfern some prey. As Poppyfur grabbed a squirrel for Tallfern, Flowerpelt fell in beside her. "Mind if I join you?"

Poppypaw gave her a questioning look. "Why?" She questioned, with a slight edge to her voice. "You're a warrior, don't you have better things to do than go to the elder's den?"

Ill-tempered she-cat. Flowerpelt thought with a flick of her ears. "Well, I want to check on Tallfern, to make sure she's alright."

"Okay." Poppypaw shrugged and picked up her squirrel. Flowerpelt walked beside Poppypaw to the elder's den. Even in camp she had the same distant and apathetic look in her eyes.

They dropped the squirrel off with Tallfern and Flowerpelt checked in on her real quick, Flintstripe was there keeping her company. He planned on retiring as well when Lakepaw became a warrior, he spent most of his nights in there already.

As they walked away from the den, Flowerpelt finally got the courage to speak to Poppypaw. "So," She said. "I heard you haven't been trying to hard in your apprentices duties." Poppypaw stopped and looked up at Flowerpelt, annoyance deep in her green eyes.

"What do you care?" Her voice was as sharp as her claws, Flowerpelt twitched her tail. "You're not one of my parents or even my mentor so why should you care?"

Flowerpelt felt a touch of sympathy for the young cat. This was something that had clearly been pressed on her many times before. "Maybe that's the reason you should tell me. I'm not your parents or your mentor, I'm just another warrior who wants to help one of her Clanmates. I won't pressure you to make any choices, I just want to know."

Poppypaw blinked, she clearly hadn't thought about it that way. After a long silence, Poppypaw let out a sigh and dropped her head. "I don't want to be a warrior."

Flowerpelt blinked, her eyes widening a bit in surprise. She wasn't expecting that answer. "What do you mean?"

Poppypaw shuffled her paws. "I want to be a medicine cat. When I was kit I did too, but Feathernose already had an apprentice so I didn't say anything. I thought it wasn't meant to happen, but then Feathernose died and I thought about telling Honeywing, but I don't know if she would want an apprentice so soon after losing her mentor."

Flowerpelt looked at Poppypaw, this was something she had clearly given a lot of thought about. It would make sense that she wasn't putting a lot of effort into patrols or hunting when she didn't want to do them, she wanted to be a medicine cat. "When Feathernose died," Flowerpelt began speaking, getting Poppypaw to look up at her. "Honeywing told me she felt lonely in the medicine cat den all the time. I bet she would love to have an apprentice."

Poppypaw's eyes went wide. "Really?"

"Why don't we go talk to her?" Flowerpelt nudged Poppypaw towards the medicine cat den.

"But-but." Poppypaw planted her feet and tried to stop Flowerpelt from pushing her. "I don't know about this..."
"You want to be a medicine cat right? The only way to do that is to talk to Honeywing." Poppypaw stopped and sighed.

"Fine." The apprentice stopped struggling and walked with Flowerpelt to Honeywing's den, though Flowerpelt could tell Poppypaw was still incredibly nervous.

"Honeywing?" Flowerpelt called into the den and stepped inside. The den was incredibly tidy and smelled strongly of herbs. From the moment they stepped inside, Poppypaw seemed to be instantly comfortable.

"What is it?" Honeywing stopped organizing some herbs, looking from Flowerpelt to Poppypaw with a twinge of concern in her eyes. *Last time I came in here I told her Feathernose died.*

"You should tell her Poppypaw." Flowerpelt urged Poppypaw to speak up. Honeywing was curious now.

Poppyfur took a deep breath. "Honeywing...I want to be your apprentice." Honeywing looked just as surprised as Flowerpelt had been. "When I was kit I wanted to be one but there were already two medicine cats, but when Feathernose died I didn't know if you would want an apprentice so soon after losing your mentor."

Honeywing's gaze softened. "Poppypaw, I would love for you to be my apprentice." She stepped closer to her. "Since Feathernose died I've been so alone in here, it would be great to have company as well as an apprentice to train. I haven't had much to do around here lately."

"Really?" Poppypaw was more excited than Flowerpelt had ever seen her before. "I'll have to tell Brightclaw though..."

"If Brightclaw was upset about you not putting enough effort into your apprentice duties then I'm sure he'll be excited to see you doing something you care about." Flowerpelt explained. "You're not his first apprentice, he won't be too disappointed."

"I'm gonna go tell him now!" Poppypaw bounded out of the medicine cat den to find her mentor. Flowerpelt turned to Honeywing.

"I've never seen her so excited." Honeywing purred. "It will be really nice to have an apprentice, I had a feeling that she wanted to be one. I hope I can train her half as well as Feathernose trained me."

"That's how I felt about training Icepetal." Flowerpelt replied. "Owlfoot was such a perfect mentor, I didn't know if I could even do half a good as job as he did with me, but I trained Icepetal into a great warrior and you'll do the same for Poppypaw."

"Thank you, Flowerpelt." Honeywing purred. "I'm excited to start

training her. Thank you for bringing her to me, I think it will be great for both of us."

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath the SunTree for a Clan meeting!"

Flowerpelt left Honeywing's den and sat down beside Stormwind, most of SunClan didn't have a clue what was going on besides Poppypaw, Brightclaw, Foxstar, Honeywing and Flowerpelt. Poppypaw looked ready to burst she was so excited, Flowerpelt purred in amusement.

"I've called you all because our apprentice, Poppypaw has realized that her destiny is not to follow the path of a warrior, but to instead follow the path of a medicine cat." There was talk of surprise and joy through SunClan. "So, Poppypaw from this day forward you will be Honeywing's apprentice. Honeywing, I trust that you will teach all your knowledge of herbs and healing onto young Poppypaw, just as Feathernose did for you."

"I will, Foxstar." Honeywing purred. "I promise." Honeywing and Poppypaw touched noses with each other and the Clan cheered. Moonfur and Owlfoot looked happy for their daughter, as did Lakepaw. Flowerpelt watched Poppypaw run off with Honeywing to the medicine cat den. Flowerpelt felt that even with the death of Feathernose, happiness was possible for Honeywing and all of SunClan.

Chapter 29

"I can't believe it's already leaf-fall." Flowerpelt mewed, watching the trees above as their leaves turned from green to red, orange and brown. "It seems like just yesterday it was leaf-bare and we lost so many warriors."

"I know." Thornpelt replied, walking beside Flowerpelt. "I hope leaf-bare isn't as bad this season."

"Even with all the precautions we took last season," Flintstripe added. "We still lost five cats and Foxstar lost a life." He sighed. "I can only hope that this season will be kinder to us." Flowerpelt shuddered as she remember the death of her mother, she couldn't imagine what would happen if she lost Stormwind, she was all that Flowerpelt had left.

The patrol returned and Flintstripe turned in their reports to Foxstar while Lakepaw ran off to talk to her fellow apprentices and Fernsong went to talk with Briarheart and Blazepaw. Flowerpelt was left alone with Thornpelt.

"Are you scheduled for any more patrols today?" Thornpelt questioned.

Flowerpelt thought for a moment. "I don't think so, Mallownose hasn't told me otherwise."

"Wanna go hunting with me? We can go out by the training area, Snowtail said she say a nest of birds there, I bet we could find some good prey." His eyes were as soft as honey, Flowerpelt let out a purr.

"I'd love to." Flowerpelt and Thornpelt walked side by side out of camp, their pelts brushing as they moved. Her heart sped up, their pawsteps were in sync as they moved. *I really love spending time with him.* Flowerpelt thought, her pelt heating up slightly.

They neared the training are and sure enough, Flowerpelt could hear the sounds of birds chirping in the trees. They each ducked down in the brush, looking for prey. Flowerpelt spotted a wren pecking at the ground. Flowerpelt extended her claws and crept slowly closer to the bird. She kept her breaths and pawsteps silent, not disturbing any of the fallen leaves under her paws.

The bird had its back turned to Flowerpelt as it searching for its own food. She gave a jump and landed on the bird, snapping its neck. Flowerpelt looked around to see where Thornpelt had gone but she couldn't spot his tabby pelt anywhere. She buried the bird and waited for him to show up, she didn't want to ruin a catch of his.

Sure enough, a few moments later Thornpelt stepped out of the brush with another wren in his jaws. Flowerpelt gave him an approving look. "I caught one too, Snowtail was right." Thornpelt put his prey with Flowerpelt's and looked around, sniffing the air.

"We should try and catch more." He mewed, already on the trail of another bird. Flowerpelt let him catch his own prey and she turned to track down more prey. She soon located another wren and caught that one with ease as well. On her way back to the training area she also found and caught a mouse. *I'm glad we're catching so much prey during leaf-fall.* She thought, hoping prey kept up being this plentiful.

Flowerpelt returned and found Thornpelt with two more birds. "Nice job." She purred. "I caught another bird and a mouse as well."

"Hunting is great today." Thornpelt set his prey down, eyes glowing. "And it helps that we're both amazing hunters." He stepped closer to Flowerpelt.

Flowerpelt looked away bashfully, her pelt burning. "You're the amazing hunter around here. You're the one who helped me catch up on my hunting skills when we were apprentices."

"Yeah, well," Thornpelt was inches away from her. "I love helping my friends."

Flowerpelt blinked and turned back to him, meeting his amber gaze. "Friends, huh? I don't see you asking Stormwind to go on private hunting sessions all the time." Flowerpelt flicked her tail.

There was a flirtatious glint in Thornpelt's eyes. "Stormwind isn't as fun to hunt with. You're my favorite cat to hunt with." He stepped even closer, their muzzles nearly grazing. "You're my favorite cat to do anything with."

Flowerpelt's heart pounded in her chest, she leaned her head forward, her nose brushing Thornpelt's. He did the same, suddenly the world around her was much, much warmer.

"Am I interrupting something?" Thornpelt jumped backward, eyes filling with alarm. Flowerpelt spun around on her paws to face Falconclaw who stood a few wavelengths away from the two of them. His eyes were narrowed and intense, glaring at both Thornpelt and Flowerpelt.

"Just hunting." Flowerpelt replied, her voice curt. *What's his problem? I'm getting real sick of him glaring at me all the time.* She flicked her tail in annoyance.

"Mallownose wants you for a patrol, Thornpelt." Falconclaw looked past Flowerpelt, his eyes resting on his nephew. "You shouldn't keep her waiting."

"I just went on a--"

"Don't argue with me." Falconclaw hissed, Thornpelt's ears flattened. For a moment he looked like he did when Falconclaw was his mentor. *Thornpelt is scared of Falconclaw.* Flowerpelt clenched her teeth. *Falconclaw is a fox-heart.*

"Let's gather our prey." Flowerpelt turned to Thornpelt. "I'll head back with you."

"Mallownose wants you now, Thornpelt." Falconclaw took a step forward. "I'll help Flowerpelt bring the prey back."

Thornpelt looked incredibly uneasy about something, he visibly swallowed and looked around. "Fine, just--" He looked at

Flowerpelt. "Be safe." He turned away and ran through the forest. Flowerpelt tensed, she felt Falconclaw's gaze burning into her.

Be safe? Flowerpelt looked at Falconclaw. *Is he going to try and hurt me?* Flowerpelt took a deep breath. "Let's get the prey and get back to camp." She kept her voice stern. *He has to know I'm not scared of him.*

"You're quite demanding, aren't you, Flowerpelt?" Falconclaw sneered. "Pretty brave for a kittypet."

Anger snapped inside Flowerpelt and she spun around to face him. "I'm *not* a kittypet." She spat.

"You will *always* be a kittypet." Falconclaw growled. "Just as your pathetic mother never stopped being a kittypet. You have kittypet blood in your veins and that's what you'll always be."

"My mother was an amazing warrior." Flowerpelt's claws dug into the earth beneath her paws.

"Your mother was weak." Falconclaw was stepping closer, menacingly inching towards Flowerpelt. She took a step back, looking around for a possible escape if she needed it, she felt like she would. "You and your sister are weak. If you really thought that I'd let my nephew become mates with a kittypet then you're stupid too."

Flowerpelt bristled, baring her teeth. "You can't control me or Thornpelt! I won't let you stop us from being together. We'll have kits together and they'll be ten times the warrior you are, Falconclaw!" *What am I saying?* Flowerpelt stood her ground. *I'm telling him what's going to have!*

"Mousebrained kittypet!" Flowerpelt wasn't expecting him to attack. She didn't have anytime to react as Falconclaw pounced and tackled her to the ground, her slammed down on a rock, sending pain throughout her entire body. She opened her eyes, dazed and saw Falconclaw towering over her. "It's time I cleanse this Clan of your mother's kittypet blood!"

Flowerpelt was too dazed to react, his paw swung as fast as lightning. She felt his claws rip through her flesh up her belly. She didn't feel any pain, but she couldn't move. Flowerpelt could feel warmth spreading across her fur, Falconclaw stepped backwards, leaving Flowerpelt on the ground, his amber eyes burning into hers.

The world started to slow down, it became harder to breathe. *So this is what it feels like to die?* Flowerpelt became very aware of her surroundings, the sun beaming down over the forest. The slow fall of the golden leaves. The wind rustling through the trees, even her own heartbeat that slowly began to stop.

The clouds were so beautiful from where she lie, coasting lazily through the blue sky. *I hope Stormwind will be okay.* Flowerpelt thought about her sister. *Snakewhisker, please take care of her for me.* Flowerpelt's eyelids grew heavier, she thought she could hear voices in the distant. *Is that StarClan?*

"Falconclaw!" The voices grew louder, Flowerpelt realized they were in the real world. It sounded like Mallownose.

"Thank StarClan you're here!" Falconclaw cried out, confusing Flowerpelt who was barely conscious anyway. "I found her like this, I don't know who did it, I caught the scent of a rogue."

"Rockfall! Rustpelt! Help Flowerpelt back to camp, quickly!" Flowerpelt couldn't move as she felt herself being lifted onto someone's back.

"You found her out here?" She recognized the voice of Owlfoot. "I don't smell any rogue out here."

"I wouldn't lie, Owlfoot." Falconclaw growled. Flowerpelt tuned out the conversation as she grew farther away. *Shouldn't I be in StarClan by now? When my mother died she said she saw Stonewhisker...* Flowerpelt wished she could see her parents.

Flowerpelt must have lost consciousness because she was a nest now, surrounded by the scent of herbs. Her eyes wouldn't open and she could feel intense pain where Falconclaw had injured her.

"Get me more cobwebs, Poppypaw." She heard the voice of Honeywing, she sounded panicked. "She's still bleeding."

"Honeywing can I see her *please.*" *That's Stormwind!* Flowerpelt tried to move, tried to speak to her sister but nothing happened.

"Stormwind, no, I need my space." Honeywing snapped. "Owlfoot, take her outside please."

As Owlfoot took Stormwind outside the den, Flowerpelt strained her ears to try and hear what the two of them were thinking. "Part of me doesn't trust Falconclaw." Owlfoot said. "There was no rogue scent."

"Did you tell Foxstar?" Stormwind asked, Flowerpelt could hear sadness and pain in her sister's voice. *Oh, I'm so sorry Stormwind. This is my fault you're upset.* Flowerpelt wished she could tell Stormwind that she was okay.

"Yes I did, he said that we have to wait and see if Flowerpelt wakes up and she can tell us who did this to her." *It was Falconclaw!* She wanted to cry and scream the truth. *Stormwind is in danger! He might try and kill her too!*

"Not if." Stormwind growled. "Honeywing *will* save her...she has too."

Flowerpelt tried to relax. *I can't die, I have to tell the Clan what happened. I have to wake up for my sister.* Despite all of her best efforts to wake up and stand, the noises faded and Flowerpelt's world went black.

Chapter 30

The sky shimmered brighter than Flowerpelt had ever seen it. She looked around, amazed at how many stars there were and how bright they shined. She felt a sense of peace around her.

"Hello, Flowerpelt." Flowerpelt heard a familiar voice. She turned to see Feathernose standing a few taillengths away. "Beautiful night isn't it?" Flowerpelt blinked, Feathernose looked amazing. His silver tabby pelt was shimmering and his eyes glowed as bright as the stars above.

"Am I dead?" Those were the only words that formed in mouth. She remembered being attacked by Falconclaw and being in the medicine cat den.

Feathernose's eyes were soft, he stepped closer. "No, Flowerpelt, you're not dead. You were close though." He sat down beside her, looking up at the stars. "It's not your time to die, death happens for a reason and your reason won't be for a while."

"Death happens for a reason? What reason did my father have for dying? Or Springkit?"

"The reasons aren't always obvious, your father died so you could find strength. I died so that Poppypaw could become Honeywing's apprentice. It is not your time to die."

"When will it be?" Flowerpelt questioned.

"Not for a long time, you have a long life ahead of you." Feathernose met her gaze. "For now, you need to return to your Clan and tell them of Falconclaw's treachery. He's being questioned but they can't prove that he's dangerous without you."

The world around them faded and suddenly Flowerpelt was sitting in the middle of SunClan camp with Feathernose still at her side. Foxstar had a meeting called and Falconclaw was sitting alone with

the Clan facing him.

"I'm sorry, but I can't accuse Falconclaw of anything without proof." Foxstar spoke to the Clan.

"He tried to murder Flowerpelt! It's clear!" Stormwind was on her paws, claws digging into the earth and her pelt bristling, she turned to Foxstar, blue eyes blazing. "You have to be blind not to notice it!"

"I agree with Stormwind." Owlfoot added, lashing his tail. "He's always hated Dovewish and how he's trying to kill her kits. There was no trace of rogues where we found Flowerpelt."

"Owlfoot is right." Icepetal spoke up. "We tracked all over the territory and found *zero* trace of any cats other than Flowerpelt, Thornpelt and Falconclaw."

"Thornpelt," It was Hawktalon who spoke up next, he was in clear distress over his brother being accused of trying to kill a cat. "What did you hear when you told Mallownose to go check out the training area?"

Thornpelt shuffled his paws, avoiding any cats' gaze. Falconclaw glared at him, the dark tabby had kept his silence during this entire conversation. "I heard fighting, I didn't know if it was dangerous so I ran until I found Mallownose and her patrol."

Flowerpelt's heart dropped. "He's lying!" She cried out, no cat could hear her though. "Why is he lying?" She turned to Feathernose, expecting answers. "He knows that Falconclaw did this!"

"I can't answer that, Flowerpelt." Feathernose response just hurt her even more. "Only Thornpelt can."

Flowerpelt sat down, unable to comprehend what was happening. "I don't wanna see anymore of this." She closed her eyes and they were back in the starry forest. "Thornpelt could prove he's guilty right now...I thought we had something." She could feel heart breaking. It was a different pain from her parents died, it was an entirely new pain. "Is his fear for Falconclaw really greater than his love for me?"

"I'm sorry you've had to struggle so much, Flowerpelt." Feathernose's voice was pained, Flowerpelt looked at him once more. There was darkness in his green eyes. "You've lost both your parents and you've experienced betrayal and intense pain." He met her gaze, it was suddenly very bright. "But you have to stay strong, you have an incredibly strong destiny ahead of you. You have to stay strong, no matter what. Your sister, your friends, and all the cats you've lost will be by your side to help you." He stepped forward, touching his nose to hers. "You just have to stay strong."

Flowerpelt opened her eyes, sunlight burned her vision. She blinked away sleep, she was confused, wondering where Feathernose had gone. She then realized she was in the medicine cat. Honeywing had her nose in her herb store and Poppypaw was sorting out some moss. Flowerpelt tried to sit up but felt a sharp pain in her belly and chest.

As she tried to move, Flowerpelt got the attention of Poppypaw. "You're awake." The medicine cat apprentice stared in surprise.

Honeywing let out a small mew of alarm and quickly turned around, bumping her head on the top of the rock ceiling of her herb store. She let out a small hiss of pain then ran over to Flowerpelt. "Thank, StarClan, you're alive!" Honeywing sighed heavily with relief. *That's one way to put it.* Flowerpelt though, still semi-lost in sleep. "How do you feel?"

"I feel...weird." Flowerpelt replied, her voice dry. "I'm thirsty." Once she said that, Poppypaw was on her paws and dipping some moss into a puddle. She brought the dropping moss over to Flowerpelt who lapped up the water. It was the most refreshing water she had ever drank. "Thank you." She breathed out when she finished.

"I know you're probably tired and in pain, and if you don't feel up to it that's fine but--" Honeywing looked around awkwardly. "We need you to tell the Clan who did this to you."

"The entire Clan thinks it's Falconclaw, but Foxstar won't do anything until he hears it from you." Poppypaw added, cleaning up some herbs.

Flowerpelt lowered her head. "I can do it." She said, attempting to stand up. Honeywing rushed to her side and helped her to her paws. Her legs were wobbly and and her entire body felt weak. "How long was I out?"

"About three days." Honeywing replied. "We'll get you some prey soon." With Honeywing's help, Flowerpelt managed to step outside the medicine cat den. The sun made her wince, it was sunhigh.

The first cat to spot Flowerpelt was Stormwind, she was sitting with Snakewhisker who appeared to be consoling her. Stormwind looked up, her blue eyes going wide and she sprinted over to Flowerpelt, making it across camp in a few short bounds. "You're awake!" Stormwind nuzzled Flowerpelt all over and for the first time since she was attacked, Flowerpelt felt safe. "I'm so glad, you're okay." Stormwind's voice trembled. "I don't know what I would've done without you, Flowerpelt."

"It's okay, Stormwind." Flowerpelt nuzzled her sister in return. "I'm okay." The two had gotten the attention of the rest of the Clan, including Falconclaw who kept a blank expression and Thornpelt who hid his gaze from Flowerpelt. Flowerpelt felt more pain in heart, but she ignored it. *I have something to do.*

"Flowerpelt." Foxstar was approach her. "I'm glad to see you're alive and well--err, well enough." He looked around awkwardly. "Did Honeywing tell you what we need to know? Do you know who did this to you?"

Flowerpelt nodded. "Yes." She looked around, Tigertail, Bramblepelt, Crowfur, Rainears and Hawktalon looked horrified. *I'm so sorry, I wish this wasn't the truth. I'm going to break their hearts.* "Falconclaw did this to me. He called me weak for being born from a kittypet and attacked me."

Gasps spread out through the Clan, Hawktalon dropped his head, Nightwing brushed up against him. All of SunClan's gazes went to Falconclaw. The tabby warrior stood up and glared at Flowerpelt. "What do you have to say for yourself, Falconclaw?" Foxstar moved closer to him.

Falconclaw looked around, a lot of SunClan was now bristling at their Clanmates. "I stand by what I did." Flowerpelt tensed, he really had no shame. Beside Flowerpelt, Stormwind let out a deep growl.

"Why don't you come at me and I'll show what a kittypet can really do!" Stormwind unsheathed her claws and spat at Falconclaw.

"I'd like to see you try." Falconclaw snorted, not breaking his gaze from Foxstar. Honeywing had to restrain Stormwind from actually attacking him. "You have ruined this Clan, Foxstar. You ruined it the moment you allowed that kittypet to join our Clan. As long as those two remain here SunClan will be impure."

"The only weakness I see," Foxstar growled, lashing his tail. "Is you, Falconclaw. Not every cat agreed with my decision to bring Dovewish into this Clan but I don't regret my choice and I know all of the cats here grew to love her. Any cat that sees themselves higher than their fellow Clanmate does not belong in SunClan." Falconclaw flattened his ears and bared his teeth. "You are hereby exiled from SunClan!"

The Clan was silent, Falconclaw and Foxstar faced each other, Flowerpelt could see rage brewing in Falconclaw's eyes but he didn't move. *He knows that he wouldn't get away with attacking Foxstar in the middle of all of SunClan.*

"You need to leave, now, Falconclaw." Flowerpelt was shocked as Hawktalon stepped forward, his amber eyes burning with the same rage Falconclaw had.

"What a shock," Falconclaw laughed. "My own brother, you never did care about me, did you?"

"I cared about the cat I thought loved his Clan." Hawktalon growled.

"I care more about this Clan than any of you!" Falconclaw shouted, fur on end and claws ripping at the soil. "That's why I tried to kill her! To rid this Clan of kittypet filth!"

"Leave!" Hawktalon lashed out, Falconclaw let out a hiss and fell back. His ear was bleeding from where Hawktalon had clawed his

ear.

"Hawktalon is right." Foxstar stopped closer to Falconclaw who in turned hissed at the leader. "If you are seen in our territory we will treat you as an enemy and attack. You best not show your face out here again."

Falconclaw hissed and turned. "I will be grateful when this Clan falls apart. Don't come crying to me when your kittypets turn out to be as weak as I said they were."

"Mallownose, Rockfall, Brightclaw, Jayflight and Rowanfall. Lead him out of territory, make sure he leaves." Foxstar growled. The named cats nodded and began escorting their former Clanmate out the camp, leaving the rest of SunClan in a shocked silence. Flowerpelt suddenly felt exhausted.

"I'm sorry you had to do that, Flowerpelt." Foxstar mewed, his voice quiet. "But we thank you for doing that as well."

"I'm tired." Was all Flowerpelt said, her voice dry. She felt sick and dizzy. She lifted her head, looking at Thornpelt only to see him vanish into the warriors den. *He's going to hate me...* She closed her eyes, trying to hide the pain that wracked her heart. *But why...why did he lie?*

Chapter 31

"Take a deep breath, please." Honeywing instructed Flowerpelt. She listened while Honeying pressed her ear on her herb coated chest. Flowerpelt had been finally slightly better in the two days since Falconclaw's exile, but only physical. She still felt guilty, for sending Thornpelt's uncle away. *I shouldn't feel guilty.* Flowerpelt thought. *He tried to kill me, but still...what if Thornpelt hates me for it?* He hadn't come to visit her at all, but his siblings had. All of them, including Hawktalon told her that they weren't mad at her but Flowerpelt still felt insanely guilty.

"Your breathing sounds fine," Honeywing replied, looking at a pile of herbs she had. "But your wound still needs a lot of healing." Flowerpelt just nodded along, she hated this feeling. Her heart felt hollow and broken. Things had been so perfect between her and Thornpelt just moments before Falconclaw showed up...

Flowerpelt laid down in her nest, trying to shove her painful thoughts about Thornpelt into the back of her mind. Flowerpelt had spent a lot of time in the medicine cat during her lifetime, both times when she injured her leg and now because of Falconclaw.

"Is there anything you'll need for tonight?" Honeywing questioned. "Poppypaw and I have to go the moonstone."

"No I'll be okay." Flowerpelt replied, letting out a yawn. "Maybe some poppy seeds so I can sleep." The poppy seeds were only partially to deal with the pain from her actual wound, but they also helped her sleep and forget about Thornpelt.

"I'll leave some out for you." Honeywing nodded. "You shouldn't have any other issues but if you do ask Moonfur, she has some good knowledge about herbs."

"Thanks, Honeywing." Flowerpelt purred, her voice genuine. She was grateful for the medicine cat's dedication, she made sure that Flowerpelt was incredibly comfortable at all times during her stay

in the medicine cat, just as Feathernose had done.

Flowerpelt curled into a ball, not trying to sleep but wanting Honeywing and Poppypaw to think she was sleeping. She closed her eyes and rested her nose over her tail, listening to the medicine cats talk about various herbs until they left for the moonstone. After they were gone, Flowerpelt lifted her head and rested her chin on her paws, letting out a deep sigh.

She was bored, but she didn't to go into camp. She just wanted to lay down and forget about the world. So many things ran through her mind, Falconclaw, Thornpelt and her dream with Feathernose. *You have an incredibly strong destiny ahead of you.* What did that mean? What destiny could she possibly have?

"Flowerpelt?" A familiar voice made Flowerpelt's entire body tense up. She looked up, towards the entrance of the den where she saw Thornpelt standing. His amber gaze was directed at the floor, he was avoiding hers. "Sorry I haven't come to check on you I just--this has been hard for me deal with."

Flowerpelt snorted, suddenly feeling very angry. She should be happy that he was finally visiting her, but she wasn't happy that he lied about Falconclaw and ignored her. "I think it's been harder for me." She lashed her tail, turning away. "I know Falconclaw is your uncle but I really couldn't lie about what he did to me, unlike you." The last part was growled under her breath but loud enough for him to hear.

"I sent Mallownose's patrol after you." Thornpelt argued.

"But you didn't tell the Clan who did this right away!" Flowerpelt spat, turning to face him once more. The movement hurt her wound, she winced. "What if I died? Would you have told them then? Or would you let Falconclaw stay here until he killed my sister too."

Thornpelt dropped his head, defeated. "You don't understand, Flowerpelt. If I would've told the Clan up front about Falconclaw he would've killed *me.* If you died I would've spoken up."

"You should've spoken up about it in the first place!" Flowerpelt was shouting now, her claws tearing at her nest. Thornpelt winced and took a step back but she was too upset to feel bad. Flowerpelt lashed her tail. "I almost died because of your uncle and you knew it was him, but you said nothing because you're scared of him. Clearly your fear is stronger than whatever it was you felt for me."

"It's not like I lied and said it wasn't him!" Thornpelt shouted in return, his claws scraping at the stone floor.

"You might as well have!" A million emotions ran through Flowerpelt's head, anger, sadness, fear. "By not speaking up for me and keeping your silence you might as well have spoken up for him."

Flowerpelt turned away, trying to calm herself down. All the yelling had aggravated her wound, she was breathing heavily. "Are you okay?" She heard Thornpelt taking a timid step forward.

"No." Flowerpelt said grit teeth. "But that's not your problem." Flowerpelt laid down, lapping up the poppy seeds Honeywing left for her. "Leave me alone, Thornpelt. I need to rest." She closed her eyes, listening to his pawsteps as they left the medicine cat den. Flowerpelt was in so much pain, and not just from her wound.

She buried her nose under her paws, now that her anger had subsided she was just left with sadness and regret. She wished she didn't yell at Thornpelt, but she also knew that she had to. He had chosen his murderous uncle over her, she couldn't just stand for that. *I thought that Thornpelt would be different from Falconclaw, maybe they're the same after all.*

Flowerpelt woke up to the sun shining on her face. She opened her eyes, her vision still foggy from sleep. Honeywing was sitting by her herb store with Poppypaw, both were setting leaves out to dry. Flowerpelt let out a yawn and sat up, getting the medicine cat's attention. Honeywing stood up and quickly padded over to Flowerpelt.

"How are you feeling?"

Horrible. "I feel okay. Not that much pain from my wound." *That's not a lie.* She sat still as Honeywing examined her wound then applied a fresh coating of cobwebs and herbs to it.

"I don't see any signs of infection so that's good. Let me know if you feel hot or if it smells infected, okay?" Flowerpelt gave a nod of acknowledgement. "Okay, I'm gonna go out and collect some more cobwebs." Honeywing turned her attention to Poppypaw. "I'll be right back, keep these herbs drying."

Poppypaw nodded and stared at the leaves, organizing them slowly. Flowerpelt watched her for a while, something seemed wrong with her. There was a shadow of doubt and sadness in her eyes, along with something that Flowerpelt couldn't recognize but seemed familiar. *It looks like...what I'm feeling.* Flowerpelt twitched her ears. *But medicine cats can't have mates...*

Flowerpelt opened her mouth to speak but was cut off by an ear splitting cry from outside. Poppypaw was on her paws in a second and sprinting out of the medicine cat den, kicking up several of the drying leaves as she did so. With her blood cold, Flowerpelt stood up and limped her way over to the medicine cat den entrance.

Flowerpelt's eyes took a moment to adjust to the sunlight after being in the dim medicine cat den, but she could see the cry came from Moonfur. Across from Moonfur was Brightclaw who had something on his back. Flowerpelt strained her eyes to see what it was, then her stomach twisted in knots. It was a dead cat.

It was Owlfoot.

Chapter 32

"What happened to him?" Poppypaw spoke, the young medicine cat was frozen in shock as she looked at her father's dead body. Flowerpelt was the same way, she couldn't move her paws, her heart was pounding.

"I was on the hunting patrol and I found him like this." Brightclaw set down Owlfoot's body, Moonfur ran to his side and threw herself on the ground beside Owlfoot, burying her nose in his brown fur.

"Who did this to him?" Rowanfall demanded.

"I think it was Falconclaw." Flowerpelt's blood turned to ice. It was Hawktalon who spoke, he was looking at Owlfoot's body. "He has the same wound that Flowerpelt has." The entire Clan turned to look at Flowerpelt who was standing in shock by the medicine cat den, she couldn't speak, it felt as if she was trying to swallow stones.

"That disgusting foxheart." Sunstream lashed her tail. "How could he kill his own Clanmates."

Because he was my mentor. The thought cut Flowerpelt even deeper. *Because Owlfoot spoke out against him from the beginning.* Flowerpelt's legs gave out and she sat down, staring at the ground in shock. Images flashed in her mind, Owlfoot's mossy gaze, warming and encouraging as he trained her. Her claws dug into the semi-frozen earth. She took the image of Owlfoot's happy, caring eyes and kept it in her head. *What reason did he have to die? Huh, tell me that Feathernose! Why did Owlfoot have to die?*

Honeywing returned to camp in shock of what had happened, she quickly took charge of the situation. She gave thyme to Moonfur and let Owlfoot's daughters gather and mourn their father. *Sandfoot and Applespots already lost their mother, I know what they're feeling.* Flowerpelt thought, remembering the pain she experienced with losing her parents. Honeywing also told Flowerpelt to return to the

medicine cat den, giving her poppy seeds to help her sleep.

Flowerpelt argued, saying she didn't want to sleep but she did want to fade away for a little bit. After all the things that had happened between Thornpelt and now her mentor dying, Flowerpelt wanted everything to go away. She curled up in her nest, closing her eyes and longing for some kind of comfort to calm her aching heart.

"Honeywing?" Flowerpelt heard her sister's voice at the entrance of the medicine cat den but Flowerpelt didn't have the energy to open her eyes.

"Yes, Stormwind?"

"Can I please stay in here with Flowerpelt? I know she's upset about Owlfoot and she needs me." After a moment of silence, Flowerpelt felt another body up against hers. She could feel the warmth of her sister and Flowerpelt was suddenly grateful that she was her. She cuddle up against her sister and for once, felt a little bit of her pain slipping away.

In the two days since Owlfoot's death the Clan hadn't really relaxed, Foxstar had stepped up patrols all over the territory to keep an eye out for Falconclaw, both day and night. Flowerpelt was still confined to the medicine cat den and still in a lot of pain from the loss of her mentor as well as everything that was going on with Thornpelt, but that hadn't been on her mind as much since Owlfoot's death. Moonfur, Sandfoot, Applespots, Lakepaw and Poppypaw were all taking time to mourn and the Clan still held the thick fog over it, nothing felt right.

When Flowerpelt was asleep she was plagued by nightmares of Falconclaw attacking her or Stormwind. Every time that Stormwind left the camp Flowerpelt was terrified that she wouldn't return alive. *What about when I can finally get back to my duties?* Flowerpelt wondered. *I don't know if I'll be able to walk the forest knowing Falconclaw is out there? Waiting to attack and kill me at any time.*

Flowerpelt shook her head, trying to shove the thoughts away but they just wouldn't leave her mind. She knew a lot of SunClan felt the same way, they didn't want to spend the rest of their lives

thoroughly patrolling the territory or never leaving alone because Falconclaw could kill without remorse.

One thing that Flowerpelt did need was fresh-air, she was allowed to leave the medicine cat den as long as she was careful and she couldn't stand it in the den any longer. The atmosphere in camp wasn't much better, but at least she wasn't being suffocated by the scent of herbs.

She sat near the drinking pool and took a long drink of water, it was icy cold and relaxing to her. Flowerpelt lifted her head when she was finished and looked around camp. Things were slow, she spotted Tallfern sharing tongues with Flintstripe outside the elder's den, Windpaw and Blazepaw were having a close conversation over some prey. Everything almost looked normal. *If only it weren't for the sadness and fear weighing all of SunClan down.* Flowerpelt thought bitterly.

Flowerpelt looked around for Thornpelt but he was nowhere to be found. *Probably on patrol.* She guessed and looked at her paws. *I hope he's okay...I wouldn't put it past Falconclaw to murder his own family...even if he didn't tell the Clan the truth.* After a while, Thornpelt returned and Flowerpelt breathed a sigh of relief. Something seemed off about him, as he moved through camp he avoided the gazes of every single cat and went straight for the warrior's den. *He came back alone.* Flowerpelt noticed. *No cat is supposed to go out alone?* In the back of Flowerpelt's mind she couldn't help but wonder if Thornpelt had been..visiting with Falconclaw.

No. Flowerpelt closed her eyes, shaking her head. *Thornpelt may be scared of him, but he wouldn't do that. I know him better than that, I know he wouldn't.* Yet, the thought wouldn't go away. It clung to her mind like a tick, sapping all of the energy she barely had. *I have to trust Thornpelt.*

The day went by and Flowerpelt stayed outside, when Stormwind returned from hunting she sat down beside her and they shared some prey. "How are you feeling?" Stormwind questioned.

"I've been better." Flowerpelt replied, staring at the squirrel that

Stormwind had brought her. She didn't have much of an appetite. "Everything seems to be spinning out of control right now. I thought things were going great for once since our mother died, but then I lost it all again."

"I know what you mean," Stormwind said in return, sounding somewhat exhausted. "I don't know exactly what you're going through but I understand the feeling of losing control." Flowerpelt took this moment to really look at her sister. She had always known Stormwind as energetic, brave and bold but her blue eyes told a different story. They were more mature and wise, filled with a love that almost looked burned into them. They also held a touch of fear, fear of Falconclaw? Fear of losing more loved ones? Both fears that Flowerpelt could understand.

"Maybe living a comfortable, safe life as a warrior just isn't possible." Flowerpelt looked up, the sun was starting to set. She felt cold, leaf-bare would be here soon wouldn't it? How much more would SunClan lose?

"I think we just have to find a way live with the chaos." Stormwind spoke, pulling Flowerpelt's gaze back to her. "Even in the most chaotic of times, I feel like we can always find a little bit of peace. Maybe not all the time, but peace will always show. During this time, since our mother died I've found my peace in you and in Snakewhisker. You two are my source of peace, without you both I'd surely go mad."

Flowerpelt thought for a long time about her sister's words. Stormwind was Flowerpelt's source of peace, Thornpelt used to be that but that wasn't the case anymore. Flowerpelt closed her eyes, no matter what was happening, as long as she had her sister, Flowerpelt would be able to find her peace.

"Foxstar!" A scared cry from the back entrance of camp, Flowerpelt's eyes shot open and she stood up, facing the direction of the voice. It was Mallownose, her patrol was returning. Beside Mallownose was Slateclaw, both cats looked terrified now. *What now? Who's dead this time?* Flowerpelt a knot forming in her stomach.

"What is it?" Foxstar ran from his den to Mallownose.

"We found a body." Slateclaw replied, his voice sounding scared and unsure. Flowerpelt's claws scraped the ground. She looked around camp franticly, who was missing?

"Who is it"? Foxstar demanded, looking around the same way Flowerpelt was. "I can't lose another warrior..."

"It--" Mallownose shuffled her paws. "It's Falconclaw...we found his body. He's dead." Flowerpelt's jaw dropped, a weird feeling filled her entire body.

"Falconclaw's dead?" Foxstar sounded just as shocked as Flowerpelt felt. Around the camp, cats of SunClan were sharing the same confused and surprised expressions. None of them knew how to felt, Falconclaw was their former Clanmate but he had also killed Owlfoot.

"We found him near the edge of territory near the thunderpath." Mallownose explained. "I don't know who killed him. We smelled a strange scent, almost like a rogue or a loner. We're not quite sure what it was." Foxstar was clearly confounded, he didn't know what to do or say.

Flowerpelt watched Hawktalon approach Foxstar, his head was high. "Foxstar," The ginger tom looked at Hawktalon. "Falconclaw doesn't deserve to be buried in SunClan territory as we do with our fallen warriors, but I don't believe we should leave his body unburied. Will you let me bury him outside of SunClan territory?"

Foxstar took a deep breath and gave a small nod. "Sure, Hawktalon. Just be careful." Hawktalon dipped his head in respect and padded up to Slatelcaw who took Hawktalon to where Flowerpelt assumed Falconclaw's body was.

"Attention, SunClan!" The entire Clan turned their focus to Foxstar who was now speaking louder. "I know that Falconclaw's death is confusing, but he was a traitor to this Clan who took the life of one of our warriors and tried to kill another." Flowerpelt couldn't help but agree. *He's not haunting this forest anymore, but that leaves one question: who killed him?*

"Another thing," Foxstar continued. "Until we figure out who killed Falconclaw I want more patrols around the back of the territory. It a rogue somehow killed him we need to find it and deal with it."

Foxstar stopped speaking and left the Clan to mutter to themselves. "That doesn't seem right." Stormwind mewed, Flowerpelt looked at her. "Falconclaw doesn't seem like the cat who would terrorize the Clan then simply die to a rogue."

Flowerpelt nodded in agreement. "I don't know." She mumbled, feeling exhaustion weighing down on her shoulders. "I'm going to get some rest, Stormwind."

"Alright," Stormwind nuzzled her cheek. "Feel better." *Unlikely.* But Flowerpelt forced a kind expression and began slowly padding back to the medicine cat den. She spotted movement from across the camp and Flowerpelt turned her head, Thornpelt was sitting outside the warrior's den. He wasn't looking at anyone or anything, but his amber gaze was distant. He didn't seem shocked or bothered by his uncle's death.

A thought crossed Flowerpelt's mind, making her stop dead in her tracks. Did Thornpelt kill Falconclaw?

Chapter 33

Flowerpelt enjoyed the cool, gentle breeze that ruffled her fur. She was resting outside the warrior's den. It wasn't cold yet, but leaf-bare would be here soon. Flowerpelt was worried about the upcoming season, but for once she was taking a moment to relax and not panic about everything going on around her.

It had been half a moon since Falconclaw turned up dead and SunClan was finding a little bit of normalcy again, even Flowerpelt. She hadn't spoke with Thornpelt in a while and she accepted the fact that whatever they had before Falconclaw tried to kill her was a thing of the past, she had to focus on her future which would be without Thornpelt.

Owlfoot's family had also been doing a little better, they were still in mourning and Flowerpelt knew that the feeling of loss would never go away, but they would learn to live without Owlfoot.

Flowerpelt closed her eyes, resting her chin on her paws and allowing herself to relax. She still wasn't cleared for any duties, but Honeywing let Flowerpelt sleep in the warrior's den and do her own thing around camp, but she would often visit the medicine cat den and help out if the two needed her.

Flowerpelt allowed the world around her to blur and she focused on her breathing and the sound of the leaf-fall breeze rustling through the leafless trees. It was refreshing almost. She had almost dozed off until a cry of fear ripped her back to the real world. Flowerpelt's heart instantly turned in knots. She jumped to paws, waiting to see a dead Clanmate.

Towards the back entrance of camp Flowerpelt saw the most recent patrol to the back of the territory, a patrol that Stormwind had been a part of. Flowerpelt sprinted across camp to see what was wrong. The cats of the patrol, Icepetal, Stormwind, Bramblepelt, Hawktalon and Windpaw all had a strange, black liquid on their coats.

Windpaw had the liquid on her left shoulder, Bramblepelt's chest was covered as well several spots on his forelegs. Icepetal and Stormwind both had it on their chests and shoulders but it was Hawktalon that scared Flowerpelt. Almost his entire face was covered with it, the tabby tom trembled, clearly in pain.

"What happened?" The voice came from Honeywing who was pushing her way through the crowd with Poppypaw on her tail.

"We were patrolling the back area of the territory beside the thunderpath," Bramblepelt explained, panting heavily. "A monster drove by and splashed this liquid onto all of us, we can't get it off and it tastes horrible. I don't if it's toxic or not."

"Get to my den." Honeywing commanded, Flowerpelt stepped aside so the affected cats could get help. She felt a twisting fear in her heart, what would happen to them? What was on them?

The cats who were close the ones in the medicine cat den were all pacing outside, Flowerpelt included. "Did it look bad?" Snakewhisker questioned Flowerpelt. "Was Stormwind in pain?" She could see the obvious love and concern in Snakewhisker's eye, a feeling they shared.

"Stormwind only had it on her chest, I think she'll be okay but I had no idea what the liquid was. I'm more concerned for Hawktalon, he had it all over his face." Flowerpelt heard a whimper from Nightwing who was sitting with her kits, clearing fearing what would happen to Bramblepelt and Hawktalon.

"We have very talented medicine cats." Snakewhisker spoke up, pulling the attention of Hawktalon's family as well as Snowtail who sat near Flowerpelt. "If any cats could figure out what this was and heal our warriors, it's them."

They all seemed to be soothed by his words, Flowerpelt was as well. Honeywing and Poppypaw are both incredibly medicine cats, the entirety of SunClan knew that they would do their absolute best.

After a long day and night of worrying, Flowerpelt and the others had to call it a night and sleep but not much sleeping was done

from any of them. The next day, all of them went to the medicine cat den to see if they had made any progress. All of the affected cats were in nests. They still had the black liquid sticking to their pelts, none of them looked comfortable.

"I'm sorry," Honeywing dipped her head, her voice strained. "We haven't figured out what to do yet. The good news is I don't think any of their lives are in danger." All of the worried cats breathed out a heavy sigh of relief.

"What about Hawktalon?" Nightwing asked, her voice shaking slightly. "It's on his eyes, what if it blinds him?"

"If it does blind me," Hawktalon spoke up. "Then I'll be alright, and so will you, Nightwing." He lifted his head, face covered in the black liquid, it was clearly very stuck to his tabby fur, but he sounded hopeful. If Flowerpelt could see his expression he knew it would be filled with love and support. *I wish I could be like Hawktalon.* Flowerpelt flicked her tail, even with the news that it wasn't life threatening, Flowerpelt still worried a great deal for all the cats covered in the strange substance.

"I have an idea." All heads turned to Poppypaw who was examining Windpaw's shoulder. "A big part of the reason we can't get it off is because of the taste and because it's stuck to their fur right?"

"Yes." Honeywing replied, curiously at what her apprentice was going to suggest.

"Well, what if we put something just as sticky that tastes marginally better than this stuff on it. They can try and bite and claw it off, it's not ideal but I think it might work. We could use honey."

Honeywing thought for a moment. "I think we have some honey...I was getting some in preparation for sore threats this cold season but we could try it." The golden medicine cat quickly padded over to her herb store. "I should have plenty of honey, but I'll need some help. She turned around and overlooked the other cats in the nursery. "Nightwing, Tigertail, Snowtail, Flowerpelt and Snakewhisker come with us. We should do this down by the river so we can wash it off."

"What about us?" Thornpelt questioned, motioning to himself, Rainears and Crowfur. "We should be able to help."

"I don't need that much help." Honeywing replied, her voice slightly on edge. "If I need your help I'll send for you. Let's go." Nightwing helped Hawktalon to his paws and let him lean on her with the help of Tigertail as well. Flowerpelt and Snakewhisker each went to Stormwind.

"How do you feel?" Snakewhisker questioned, looking over the black liquid clinging to her fur.

"I want this stupid stuff off." Stormwind growled, clearing irritable. "I hate it, it's so uncomfortable. I'd sooner claw off all my own fur than deal with it for any longer."

"If Poppypaw's plan works then you won't have to." Flowerpelt tried to bring up Stormwind's hopes but she just let out a snort. The group of cats made it to the river with the honey and each of the cats covered by the liquid sat down by the water.

"We'll have to do Hawktalon a bit differently, but let's get the started on the rest of you." Honeywing mewed, dropping a leaf bundle filled with honey beside each cat. "Get that smeared on all the liquid. It won't be pleasant getting it off but it needs to come off."

Flowerpelt carefully picked up the honey and began smothering the thick, golden liquid on top of the black liquid. Snakewhisker did the same to Windpaw while Tigertail helped Bramblepelt and Snowtail helped Icepetal.

When Flowerpelt felt she had a good coating of the honey she turned to Honeywing for guidance on what to do next. "When you have them covered, step into the river. Flowerpelt tensed. She vowed to never step in the river, not after Feathernose's death. *I have to.* Flowerpelt took a deep breath. *For Stormwind.* Flowerpelt and Stormwind made their way to the river.

She took a step inside the water, cold instantly shooting up her entire body. She let out a hiss and forced herself the rest of the way

win. Stormwind had the same reaction and instantly began shivering. "I hate this." She growled.

"I know Stormwind." Flowerpelt tried to calm her sister, it wasn't working.

"Now try and cleaning it, both of you." Flowerpelt licked the mixture of honey and the strange the liquid, nearly gagging at the taste of the black stuff. If the honey made it better, she could only imagine what it tasted like without it. Stormwind sat down in the river and began doing the same thing. "Bite it if you need to." Honeywing instructed.

Flowerpelt shared a look with Stormwind, she really didn't like the idea of biting her sister and ripping her fur off. "Just do it." Stormwind grit her teeth. "I want this off." Flowerpelt took a deep breath and bit down on a chunk of fur that was stuck to the honey and liquid. With a yank, Flowerpelt ripped it away from Stormwind's fur.

Stormwind let out a yowl of pain and Flowerpelt nearly panicked. "I'm so sorry!" Stormwind looked at the area where Flowerpelt had bitten.

"Don't be." Stormwind said through grit teeth. "It's coming off." Flowerpelt looked at the spot, Stormwind's fur was gone but so was the liquid. "Keep going. I can handle it." Stormwind put on a brave face and Flowerpelt forced herself to continue.

After a long time, and many painful cries, the cats covered in the liquid, minus Hawktalon were free of it. However, all of them had patches of fur missing, but they all looked relieved. Flowerpelt and Stormwind climbed out of the river and pressed up against each other, trying to get warm. "Thank you." Stormwind purred, nuzzling Flowerpelt. "I feel so much better."

Now the question was about Hawktalon, clearly the same method wouldn't be able to be used on him, they couldn't rip off his eyelids. "Alright, Hawktalon." Honeywing stood beside him. "I have an idea on what to do for you, but you might like it."

"I'll do anything at this point, I want this off." Hawktalon's mew was desperate, he was clearly in pain. Flowerpelt couldn't imagine what it felt like to have your eyes sealed shut.

"Follow me into the river, Nightwing you come too." Hawktalon's mate followed him and Honeywing into the river, both shivering as they touched the water. "Hawktalon, I'm gonna need you to dip your face into the river while we try and lick the the stuff off, okay? Just lift your head back up when you need a breath."

"Alright, I trust you." Hawktalon took a deep, shaky breath and dipped his head under the surface. Honeywing and Nightwing did the same thing. After a while, all three heads popped up.

"I think it's working!" Nightwing said in excitement.

"Then keep going." Hawktalon dunked his head once more. All the cats waited for a long time, but each time Hawktalon's head came up, it was clearer and clearly. Finally, his head popped up and he opened his eyes. Something seemed wrong tho, he was blinking rapidly and looking around in confusion.

"Hawktalon..?" Nightwing brushed up against her mate. "Can you..?"

"No." Hawktalon's reply was blunt, he dropped his head. "I can't see."

Flowerpelt's heart dropped, she felt Stormwind let out a saddened sigh, the others around them had similar reactions.

"Don't feel sorry for me." Hawktalon spoke up, this time louder. "I'm just glad we're all safe. I told you that if I lost my vision I would be okay and I will be. This isn't the end of me, just a different kind of beginning."

Chapter 34

"You need to calm down, Flowerpelt." Lakeflight purred, the gray she-cat was resting outside the nursery.

"I don't see how I can, Lakeflight." Flowerpelt said impatiently. "That's my sister in there! Giving birth to my own kin."

"Stormwind is in very capable paws, and you know that." Lakeflight licked her paw. Flowerpelt looked at the queen, she knew that she was right. Not long after Hawktalon lost his vision to the black liquid, Windflight, Lakeflight and Blazeheart had been made warriors. Poppyfur had also earned her full medicine cat name for coming up with the idea to help them.

That was three moons ago, two moons ago Stormwind had announced that she was expecting Snakewhisker's kits and a moon after, Lakeflight was expecting Slateclaw's. It couldn't have happened at a worse time, Flowerpelt thought as it was officially leaf-bare. Flowerpelt didn't want her sister or Lakeflight to lose their kits to the harsh season of leaf-bare.

Flowerpelt took a deep breath, trying to relax herself. She could hear Stormwind's cries of pain from inside the nursery and Flowerpelt knew it was completely natural, but she couldn't help but completely panic about it.

After a few moments, Stormwind's cries stopped. Flowerpelt tensed, she watched the entrance as Poppyfur poked her head out, green eyes as soft as moss. *She has Owlfoot's eyes.* Flowerpelt thought. "Flowerpelt, come and meet your niece."

Only one? Flowerpelt tilted her head and stepped into the nursery. Stormwind was looking at a tiny, gray she-cat who nuzzled at her belly. Flowerpelt blinked in surprise, feeling a rush of love pass over her.

Snakewhisker was beside Stormwind, licking her ears lovingly.

"Come here." Stormwind beckoned Flowerpelt closer. "This is my daughter."

Flowerpelt stared at the tiny kit, she had seen kits been born before but none of them had filled her with this kind of reaction. Her heart swelled up and she felt a wave of love and protection. "She's beautiful, Stormwind." Flowerpelt nuzzled her sister, purring loudly. "Do you have a name for her?"

Stormwind let out a small chuckle and shared a gaze with Snakewhisker. "I was thinking about naming her Dovekit...after Dovewish."

Flowerpelt's felt a skip in her heart beat. She took a closer look at Dovekit. *She looks a lot like Dovewish.* "I think it's a perfect name."

A few days had passed since the birth of Dovekit and for the first time in a long time, Flowerpelt felt in intense feeling of happiness. Despite the season of leaf-bare, Dovekit was a perfectly healthy kit. She wasn't very active yet, just mewling without meaning and nursing from her mother. Flowerpelt couldn't wait until she was older, she could play with her.

The whole situation had gotten Flowerpelt really thinking about mates and kits. During her short relationship with Thornpelt she had wanted kits, she wanted to raise a family with him. That was what she had told Falconclaw before he attacked her, but now that she and Thornpelt no longer had anything...Flowerpelt didn't want kits. She wasn't even sure if she wanted a mate, she wanted to be leader. Her mind had truly focused back on what she wanted for her future. The only kit she wanted in her life right now was Dovekit.

Flowerpelt looked around the camp, for once she wasn't terrified for the start of leaf-bare. SunClan had spent a lot of time collecting prey and from what she knew Honeywing and Poppyfur had a lot of catmint for sickness. *I have a good feeling about this season.*

Flowerpelt looked over at the elder's den, all four elders were relaxing and talking. As he said, when Lakeflight was made a warrior Flintstripe joined Tallfern in the elder's den. With his failed

vision, Hawktalon decided to retire as well and Nightwing did the same. "I may be young but there are plenty of cats who can do the things I can no longer do. I want to relax with the love of my life."

Flowerpelt admired their relationship, Hawktalon and Nightwing had a love unlike any other. Flowerpelt was starting to similar relationships however. Tigertail and Sunstream were clearly very much in love with each other as well as Bramblepelt and Willownose. Part of Flowerpelt wanted a love that that, but part of her didn't as well. *If I ever do become leader, I won't have time for a mate or kits.*

Flowerpelt turned her attention to the medicine cat den. Honeywing was out collecting what herbs didn't get killed in the frost and Poppyfur was sitting outside. She was staring at her paws, something seemed to be upsetting her. Flowerpelt recalled a while ago, when Falconclaw had been discovered dead, she was going to ask Poppyfur what was bothering her. She never did, was it still her father?

Flowerpelt crossed the camp to speak with the medicine cat, Poppyfur looked up as Flowerpelt got closer. "Hey, is everything okay? I've noticed you've been looking distracted and kind of sad."

Poppyfur looked away quickly. "It's nothing, I'm fine."

Flowerpelt knew she was lying. "Come on, Poppyfur. If you can talk to anyone, you can talk to me. I'm the one you talked to when you wanted to be a medicine cat, remember?" Poppyfur lifted her head and looked around, her eyes darting.

"Okay," She lowered her voice. "But we can't talk about it here, follow me."

"Why--"

"Just follow me if you want me to tell you!" Poppyfur cut her off with a sharp hiss, Flowerpelt narrowed her eyes. *Still as ill tempered as ever, I see.* Flowerpelt thought, but followed Poppyfur out of the back entrance of camp. The cream and black she-cat led her to the moss hollow where they sat down. "Okay..." Poppyfur took a deep

breath. "You have to promise not to tell any cat about this okay?"

Flowerpelt was somewhat uncomfortable, but Poppyfur was reaching out to her, she had to respect her wishes. "I promise."

Poppyfur took another deep breath. "I..." *This is clearly hard to her to say.* "For the past couple moons...I've been kind of...seeing a LichenClan cat..." Flowerpelt's jaw dropped, she really wasn't expecting this.

"What do you mean...seeing?"

"Seeing as in we've been meeting in secret." Poppyfur snapped, then calmed herself down. "I'm sorry it's just...I know it's wrong. I wanted so badly to be a medicine cat, but then I met him..." She closed her eyes. Flowerpelt could see the struggle that was going on in Poppyfur's head. *She's just confused.* "His name is Branchfur, we met when we were apprentices and we've been meeting for a long time...I'm really happy around him."

She dropped her head, sounding incredibly defeated. "I know I can't be with him, but it hurts to think about not being with him. I can't tell Honeywing because I'm scared she'll tell me I can't be a medicine cat anymore."

"Do you want to still be a medicine cat?" Flowerpelt questioned, wishing she could find better words to help her. Flowerpelt could only slightly relate to what she was feeling. She fell in love with a cat she couldn't be it, but Poppyfur was a medicine cat who was forbidden to have a mate, let alone a mate from a different Clan.

"Of course I do!" Poppyfur exclaimed. "I want nothing more than to be a medicine cat, it's the thing I love most." She quieted down again. "I know I need to say goodbye to Branchfur, I'm just not sure how to do it." She closed her eyes.

"I'm sorry you have to go through something like this." Flowerpelt mewed. "It can't be easy. I think that Honeywing will understand if you tell her, but you have to end this relationship. I'm sorry I can't be more help."

"It's okay." Poppyfur sighed, Flowerpelt felt guilty. *She came to me for help and I can't even do that.* "I know I need to stop it, but...don't tell Honeywing okay? I'd like to be the one to tell her."

"I won't tell her." Flowerpelt promised again.

"Thanks for letting me tell you." Poppyfur stood up. "It feels a lot better having it off my chest." The medicine cat looked up. "I just hope I can find the strength to say goodbye to Branchfur." Flowerpelt blinked. She watched Poppyfur as she climbed out of the moss hollow, the medicine cat looked different somehow. When she was just an apprentice, she had eyes full of hope and wonder. Now she was haunted by her forbidden relationship with a LichenClan warriors.

Oh, Poppyfur. You have the strength to say goodbye, just as I did. You're an amazing medicine cat, I hope you know that.

Chapter 35

"But I wanna go outside!" Dovekit complained, her blue eyes filled with a fake sadness.

"Sorry, sweetie." Stormwind nuzzled her daughter. "You're too young and it's too cold. I don't want to risk sickness."

Flowerpelt nodded in agreement. Dovekit was a moon old and leaf-bare was in full swing. Luckily, there hadn't been in any serious signs of sickness. Flintstripe and Briarheart had been coughing but were quickly treated by Honeywing and Poppyfur and were already recovering.

"Are you going to the gathering tonight?" Stormwind questioned, distracting Dovekit with a ball of moss to play with.

Flowerpelt nodded. "I haven't been to one since I was injured." Flowerpelt took a look at the scar down her chest, it was healing nicely and she could go on patrols but couldn't do much else. Honeywing had finally cleared her to go the gathering tonight. "I just wish it wasn't during leaf-bare, it's gonna be so cold."

"I'll be in a nice warm den tonight." Stormwind held her head eye, a bragging glint in her eyes.

Flowerpelt playfully shoved her sister. "Yeah? With a kit crawling all over you? I'd rather take the cold."

Stormwind stuck out her tongue and flicked Flowerpelt over the ears with her tail. "Don't you have a cold gathering to get to?"

"I do." Flowerpelt laughed and stood up, leaving her sister and niece to stay warm in the nursery. The sun was starting to set and Foxstar was gathering the cats who were preparing to leave for the gathering. Flowerpelt stepped in beside Icepetal who was talking with Snowtail.

She noticed Poppyfur, the medicine cat looked incredibly uncomfortable. *I wonder if she ended things with Branchfur.* Flowerpelt wondered. *I hope so, I hope Poppyfur can be happy now.*

"If we're ready we should head out." Foxstar mewed, Flowerpelt noticed his voice was slightly dry. She tensed, he wasn't coughing but his throat was definitely strained. Foxstar led his Clan out of the camp and through the snowy forest. It was already cold, Flowerpelt hoped this gathering wouldn't take too long.

One thing she did know that she missed about the last gatherings was that Jumpstar of LichenClan had joined StarClan and they were now led by Elmstar. Flowerpelt heard a lot of rumors that Elmstar was very battle hungry and that he had gotten into fights with both AshClan and MoonClan since he had been made leader. *I don't like battle hungry leaders.* Flowerpelt thought back to Goldenstar, she was battle hungry and caused the death of Stonewhisker. SunClan was lucky that Foxstar was a very peaceful leader.

When they reached the gathering hollow, Flowerpelt noticed that there weren't as man LichenClan as their usually were, even for leaf-bare. She couldn't even find the deputy, Jaggedtail. *Is LichenClan full of sick cats?* She wondered. She spotted Elmstar talking with Cloudstar and Ivystar near the trees.

Elmstar saw SunClan and a there was a glint in his eyes that made Flowerpelt uneasy. It was very malicious. She tensed and ducked her head, the SunClan cats settled down and Flowerpelt still felt awkward stares from the cats of LichenClan. Her eyes found Branchfur, a large, dark brown tom. He was looking directly at Poppyfur, and it wasn't a love-filled gaze, it looked malevolent. Flowerpelt restrained herself from extending her claws.

"Sorry for being late." Foxstar dipped his head to the other leaders.

"It's alright, Foxstar." Ivystar said kindly. "But let's get started, I'm freezing my ears off." The leaders jumped up to their trees, looking over their Clans. "Foxstar, you start us off."

"First off, Stormwind gave birth a healthy kit and Lakeflight should be giving birth soon as well. Despite the cold, SunClan is thriving

well and we haven't had any sickness." Foxstar sat back down, his voice still sounding dry. Did the other leaders notice that?

"Good to hear." Ivystar nodded. "AshClan is also doing well, we don't have much to report other than that we haven't had any sickness either and we have enough prey." Ivystar nodded to Cloudstar who stood up next. Flowerpelt noticed that Elmstar's claws were digging into the branch under his paws, she narrowed his eyes. *What's his problem?*

"MoonClan is doing well, we are happy to announce that we have two new apprentice. Please welcome Ebonypaw and Shadepaw." The Clans cheered. "And we haven't had any bad sickness either."

"Your turn, Elmstar." Ivystar nodded to Elmstar, the dark brown leader stood up.

"My only announcement is to the other Clans." Elmstar's voice resonating throughout the forest, Flowerpelt tensed. So did Snowtail and Icepetal beside her.

"What's he talking about?" Flowerpelt heard Crowfur mutter.

"Since I was young, LichenClan have been at odds with MoonClan, simply because they don't know how to forgive or forget." Elmstar's eyes sparked dangerously. *That whole thing is still going on between them?*

"You started that war yourself, Elmstar." Cloudstar growled.

"And you had continue it, Cloudstar." Elmstar lashed his tail. "We've had battles with MoonClan and AshClan alike, you want to hold grudges so I can do it too. You've messed with LichenClan one too many times!" He was shouting now, the cats from the other Clans were hissing. "There's one Clan here who hasn't dared attack us." Elmstar's eyes locked with Foxstar's. "I don't want you thinking you're safe. You have to know that LichenClan is a force to be reckoned with."

"I hope you're not threatening my Clan." Foxstar's voice was calm, his tail tip twitched.

"And if I am?"

"Then you'll regret it." There was a dangerous edge to Foxstar's voice. "You are a young leader, since you have nine lives you think you can do whatever you want. You think you can win any battle or fight any war. If you think like that then your nine lives will be gone before you can blink." Foxstar jumped down. "If you try and fight me and my Clan you will lose, Elmstar. SunClan! We're leaving!"

"Run away, Foxstar!" Elmstar taunted. "I'll see you on the battlefield! I won't lose!"

"You're insane, Elmstar." Cloudstar growled.

"No, Cloudstar. I'm a fearless, leader who will drive LichenClan into a life of victory!"

"What is his problem?" Mallownose questioned, lashing her tail. "He must think he's entitled to the entire forest because he became leader."

"That's a very dangerous leader." Foxstar said with an angry sigh. "But, we do need to prepare for an attack from LichenClan very soon. I want constant patrols around the river and any battle training."

"We can't risk a fight, Foxstar." Honeywing spoke up. "We don't have the herbs to deal with severe wounds."

"We might not have a choice, Honeywing." Foxstar replied. "Elmstar was serious about attacking us. We have to prepare." Honeywing sighed and turned away, mumbling something about stupid, careless leaders.

"Don't fear, SunClan." Foxstar raised his voice. "We've faced sickness, betrayal, and even things we don't understand, but we are strong. No matter how hard Elmstar tries, he will not tear us down!"

Chapter 36

"SunClan! SunClan! LichenClan is attacking!" Flowerpelt jolted awake, feeling a slight pain in her chest. The cats around her in the warrior's den where scrambling awake as well. The warriors in the den scrambled out to defend their camp. Flowerpelt saw that the camp had been overrun with LichenClan warriors.

Flowerpelt was instantly tackled to the ground by a dark gray she-cat named Ashstream, she felt claws ripping into her pelt. *I shouldn't be fighting, Honeywing told me not to.* Flowerpelt bit down into Ashstream's foreleg. *I just have to be careful.* Ashstream clawed violently at her haunches, Flowerpelt hissed and dug her claws into the she-cat's shoulder, flipping her over and throwing her to the side.

Ashstream jumped up and spat at her, lashing her tail with rage. Flowerpelt jumped at the she-cat, they collided half way and landed on the ground. Ashstream's claws tore through Flowerpelt's flesh, she felt blood welling from deep wounds on her side. *If I'm not careful, I could easily end up tearing open my old wound.* Flowerpelt thought, she made sure to not ever let her belly and chest be exposed to Ashstream.

Ashstream jumped onto Flowerpelt's back, forcing her to the ground. Flowerpelt could attack from this angle, she was left with Ashstream clawing at her back. She hissed and did her best to throw the LichenClan warrior off but she was stuck to her like a tick. With nothing else to do, Flowerpelt cried out for help.

Sure enough, Mallownose came running from the fray of battle and tackled Ashstream to the ground, allowing Flowerpelt to stand up. Flowerpelt spun and around and faced Ashstream who was now locked in battle with Mallownose. The SunClan deputy fought viciously, biting and clawing all around Ashstream's body.

Ashstream let out an angered, sickening hiss and jumped on Mallownose, pinning the gray she-cat on her back. Flowerpelt ran to

help Mallownose, but Ashstream moved quicker. The she-cats teeth sank into Mallownose's neck and the deputy let out a choked cry. "No!" Flowerpelt cried and jumped onto Ashstream once more, the two she-cats did a somersault over each other and landed a few mouselengths away.

However, Flowerpelt wasn't staying to fight. She scrambled to her paws and ran to Mallownose. "Mallownose!" She cried. The gray she-cats eyes were glossy, she tried to speak but no words came out. She let out a shaky breath, then the deputy's breath stopped entirely. "Mallownose!" She cried once again, trying to nudge her awake. *Ashstream will pay for this.* Flowerpelt stood up, anger blazing inside her like a fire. "You killed my deputy!" She spat. Ashstream's eyes went a little wider.

"I-I didn't--" Flowerpelt let out a caterwaul and launched herself at Ashstream, clawing violently at her chest. The cat let out a shriek of pain and scrambled away from Flowerpelt, running into the forest, out of SunClan camp. Her entire body ached and her wounds burned, Flowerpelt panted heavily. The battle didn't seem to be ending anytime soon, however. Cats were fighting viciously, bleeding from heavy wounds.

Flowerpelt looked at Mallownose's body. *I can't leave her here.* Flowerpelt quickly padded back to the deputy's body and grabbed her by the scruff, dragging her body to the medicine cat den. Inside the den was just Poppyfur, she was frantically tending to a nasty chest wound on Fernsong. Cloudstorm and Sandfoot were also resting from wounds.

Poppyfur looked up, her eyes going wide at the sight of Mallownose's body. "She's dead?" Her voice was strained and full of fear. Flowerpelt nodded and set down the deputy's body.

"Where's Honeywing?" Flowerpelt questioned, the golden medicine cat was nowhere to be found.

"She went to go get some more marigold." Poppyfur's voice trembled. "I'm using the last of it on Fernsong." Her entire body and voice shook, her paws were uneasy. "She's been gone a while, I'm worried about her."

Flowerpelt took a deep, shaky breath. "Don't, Poppyfur. Honeywing is strong, she'll make it back okay but we need our medicine cat here."

"I'm not much of a medicine cat without any herbs!" Poppyfur exclaimed, her eyes wide with fear. "I barely have a few strings of cobweb left." She stopped working on Fernsong who was well patched up. "I have to go and find her." Poppyfur turned and started leaving the medicine cat den.

"Wait!" Flowerpelt called to her. "What are we going to do if bad wounds come in here? We need our medicine cat!" Poppyfur stopped and looked over shoulder.

"If any really bad wounds need help then use moss to try and stop the bleeding. We have a small bit of goldenrod left, use that to chew into a poultice and put it on the moss. I'll be back as soon as I find Honeywing!" Before Flowerpelt could stop her, Poppyfur was gone. Flowerpelt stood in the medicine cat den, horrified. *I'm not a medicine cat! Why am I the one in charge of this!*

Flowerpelt paced inside the den, her wounds still burning but she would dare use the last of the healing herbs on herself. No wounded cats were coming but she knew they were out there and it was only a matter of time.

The first cat to come inside was Rainears, she had a deep wound in her side and could barely walk, she had Crowfur at her side to steady her. "Flowerpelt?" Crowfur tilted her head. "Where's Poppyfur and Honeywing?"

"Honeywing left to get herbs but hasn't returned so Poppyfur ran after her and now I'm here." Flowerpelt replied, aware of just how panicked she sounded.

"Whatever," Crowfur helped Rainears into a nest. Flowerpelt ran to the back of the medicine cat den to get the moss and goldenrod.

"Use the moss to try and stop the bleeding." Flowerpelt told Crowfur who nodded and did what she said. Flowerpelt chewed the herb and placed it on more moss to put on Rainears's wound. Rainears let

out a wince as the herb juices went into her wound, but after a moment she looked relieved.

"Has anyone else died?" Flowerpelt questioned Crowfur, explaining that Ashstream had killed Mallownose.

"Jayflight is dead." Crowfur replied, her voice low. "I don't know who killed him, but I saw his body. I couldn't stop to get him, I had to get Rainears help."

"I understand." Thankfully, Rainears's wound wasn't as bad as it looked, they got the bleeding to stop so Flowerpelt used more moss to lay on top of it until Poppyfur and Honeywing returned.

Crowfur went back into the battle while Flowerpelt kept watch over the sick cats. She could hear the pained yowls and hisses of the fighting cats. *This is the worst battle I've ever seen.* Flowerpelt thought, her stomach churning. *Why would Elmstar do this?*

After a long wait, Flowerpelt saw Poppyfur, her green eyes were empty and sad. "Poppyfur!" Flowerpelt ran to the medicine cat, she had several herbs in her jaw. "Where's Honeywing, did you find her?"

Poppyfur set the herbs down and moved to Rainears, brushing away the moss to cover her wound with cobwebs. "She's dead."

Flowerpelt's heart dropped. "What?" She could barely from the words. "Where is she?"

"Branchfur killed her." Flowerpelt's eyes went wide, she could hear the pain in Poppyfur's voice. "He was mad that I told him we couldn't see each other anymore, so when he found Honeywing he killed her in front of me." Poppyfur's body shook, she was in clear distress. "I couldn't do anything to save her, she told me to take the herbs and care for SunClan so I am."

Poppyfur met Flowerpelt's gaze, inside her eyes was the soul of a broken cat. Flowerpelt's heart ached for many reasons, Honeywing was dead. Poppyfur had to watch her beloved mentor die at the claws of a cat she thought she loved. "Flowerpelt." Poppyfur mewed,

her voice growing bolder. "Go out there and fight for our Clan. Chase LichenClan out our territory and show Branchfur that even though he killed Honeywing he won't break us."

Flowerpelt felt somewhat inspired from Poppyfur's words. Flowerpelt nodded and ran out into the battle. Blood covered the ground, all the cats in the battle were bleeding and tired. *This battle won't last much longer, neither sides can take it.* Flowerpelt scanned the fighting, looking for any cats that needed help.

While she was looking she spotted more bodies, including Rockfall and Moonfur. *Poppyfur is going to be torn apart...* Flowerpelt shook her head, she couldn't think about that right now. She also saw Gingerdust, Daisyfern and Timberfall of LichenClan. Flowerpelt eventually spotted Jaggedtail, the LichenClan deputy. He was fighting Bramblepelt who bled heavily from a wound on his shoulder.

Flowerpelt ran over to the two toms and jumped on Jaggedtail's back, knocking him over and letting Bramblepelt run for help. Jaggedtail threw Flowerpelt off, she rolled across the ground but quickly jumped to her paws. *I always thought Jaggedtail was a decent warrior.* "Why are you attacking my Clan?" Flowerpelt demanded. "You're killing my warriors! Your warriors are dying too!"

Flowerpelt saw pain flash in Jaggedtail's eyes, a look she wasn't expecting. "I didn't want this to happen." He said, his voice strained and exhausted. "But Elmstar is my leader and I have to follow his word."

"A leader doesn't go blindly into battles causing the deaths of innocent cats!" Flowerpelt cried. "Elmstar is a monster, Jaggedtail! I'm sure you can see that yourself." Jaggedtail's amber eyes looked frantically around, they were filled with fear and pain.

"Let this be a lesson!" Foxstar's voice cut through the battle, silencing it as all heads turned to the SunClan leader. Beside Flowerpelt, Jaggedtail let out a cry of alarm as he saw Elmstar's body lying at Foxstar's paws, the LichenClan leader was losing a life. "I don't care how young of a leader you are, if you challange my Clan you will lose!"

Elmstar's body jolted and he stood shakily to his paws, Foxstar knocked him back down with a quick hit to the head. Elmstar landed awkwardly and hissed at Foxstar, but he could clearly no longer fight. Jaggedtail ran to Elmstar's side and for a moment, Flowerpelt thought that he would attack Foxstar. Instead, Jaggedtail dropped down beside Elmstar. In his eyes was love and worry, they were clearly close friends. *That's why Jaggedtaill follows him so closely, but he's going to have to choose between loyalty between his friend and loyalty to the safety of his Clan.*

"Elmstar," Jaggedtail said to his leader. "We have to retreat, we can't fight any longer." Elmstar growled at Jaggedtail but said nothing.

"Listen to your deputy, Elmstar." Foxstar growled. "Gather your dead and get out of my territory."

"Very well," Elmstar growled and stood up with the help of Jaggedtail. "But this isn't over, Foxstar." The leader spat. "LichenClan! Get our dead! We're leaving!" Flowerpelt just stood in shock at what had happened. There was an uncomfortable silence as LichenClan left.

When they had all gone, Foxstar spoke up once more. "We shouldn't have had to fight this terrible battle," He spoke, exhausted. "But I'm proud of all of my warriors for fighting. Just as I said before, SunClan will never fall and it's thanks to all of you."

Chapter 37

Flowerpelt's entire body ached from the fighting. The wounds that Ashstream had given her had stopped bleeding but they still burned. Cats were lining up outside the medicine cat den to get their wounds treated. Foxstar had sent Tigertail and Sandfoot to retrieve Honeywing's body, Sunstream was in the process of grieving with Brightclaw over her death. Flowerpelt felt a hollow feeling in her body. *We lost so many.* All the cats that had died were Mallownose, Jayflight, Rockfall, Honeywing and Moonfur. *No we're without a deputy and one of our medicine cats.*

Flowerpelt painfully padded over to the nursery, hoping to find her sister, her niece and Lakeflight in safe conditions. She breathed a sigh of relief when she saw all in the nursery were safe. Dovekit was hiding in the corner, clearly shaken up by the battle and Stormwind had a small series of wounds on her shoulder, but they had already stopped bleeding.

When Stormwind saw Flowerpelt she ran up to her, nuzzling her all over. "I'm so glad you're alright." She said in relief. "Do you know if Snakewhisker is okay?"

Flowerpelt nodded. "Snakewhisker is fine." Flowerpelt remembered seeing the gray warrior with only minor wounds. "I'm sure he'll be here to visit you as well."

"What about Slateclaw?" Lakeflight questioned, her eyes filled with worry.

"He was in the medicine cat den a while ago, but I'm pretty sure he'll life. He did just lose both parents though. He'll be upset about that."

"I'll be there for him." Lakeflight vowed, her belly was so round with kits. *If only Mallownose and Rockfall could meet them.* Flowerpelt thought sadly.

"I wonder who the new deputy will be." Stormwind thought. "Foxstar has plenty of time to pick one, but it's been Mallownose for so long." Flowerpelt nodded slowly, Mallownose had been deputy for longer than Flowerpelt had been alive. She had wanted to become deputy for a long time, but Flowerpelt didn't know if it even would be her or if she would be able to match up to Mallownose.

"I'm going to go help with things around camp." Flowerpelt touched her nose to Stormwind's cheek. "You take care of Dovekit, okay?" Stormwind wrapped her tail around her daughter.

"I always do." She gave a half-purr. Flowerpelt dipped her head and turned out of the nursery. She felt something cold hit her nose, she looked up and saw that it was snowing again. *For once, I'm grateful for snow. I hope all of this bloody snow gets covered up with pure, fresh snow.* She breathed out a sigh, her breath billowing out in front of her.

From across the camp, Flowerpelt heard coughing. It was coming from Briarheart. Flowerpelt heart dropped. *Please, we can't deal with sickness right now.* Flowerpelt sat down, watching her Clan try and recover from the horrific battle that had taken place. They had a lot of things to do, they had to hold a vigil for the fallen cats and Foxstar had to name a new deputy before moonhigh. Luckily, the battle itself had taken place after moonhigh so they had an entire day before they had to do that.

Flowerpelt felt exhausted, her wounds had already been treated so she decided she would rest for a bit. Flowerpelt turned and entered the warriors den, several warriors already had the same idea that she did. She thought it would be hard to fall asleep, with the weight of all the deaths weighing on her shoulders but she was exhausted enough that Flowerpelt fell asleep the moment she curled into a ball into her soft nest.

Flowerpelt felt a paw jabbing into her side. She forced her eyes open and looked up, Icepetal was standing over her. It took Flowerpelt a moment to remember everything that happened. *LichenClan attacked. We lost a lot of warriors.* She shook her head, trying to clear her sleep-clogged brain. "What is it?" Her speech was

slurred.

"Foxstar is going to announce the new deputy soon. You should gather with us." Icepetal explained. Flowerpelt looked around the warriors, a few remaind in here from their own rests and they were waking up as well. Flowerpelt gave a groggy nod and climbed out her nest and into the cold, night air. She didn't realize she had slept so long, but it was nearly moon high. Foxstar was sitting on the SunTree, it looked strange to see that Mallownose wasn't there either.

The cats were starting to gather, Flowerpelt made it to the crowd and sat down beside Snakewhisker and Icepetal, she noticed Foxstar watching her closely but she didn't give it any thought.

"Cats of SunClan," Foxstar began. "I know this battle has been horrible, we lost many good warriors including our deputy and one of our medicine cats. All cats that have joined StarClan today will be remembered with love and honor." The Clan held a moment of silence for their fallen warriors. "However, life must go on and the warrior code must not broken. It is nearly moonhigh and it is time for me appoint a new deputy." The cats of SunClan muttered to themselves, all wondering who it would. Flowerpelt figured that Tigertail would make a great deputy, he was strong, young and brave.

"I say these words before the spirit of Mallownose, and all the cats lost today, so they may hear and approve my choice." There was a long moment of anticipation. "Flowerpelt will be the new deputy of SunClan!"

Flowerpelt's jaw dropped, she was completely taken by surprise. "Me?" She replied, looking around. She met Icepetal's gaze, her blue eyes were glowing with excitement.

"I spoke to many cats about it and they all gave me the same answer. I also saw your conversation with Jaggedtail during the fight, you understand the warrior code but also understand that sometimes you have to challenge what we think we know."

Flowerpelt couldn't believe her ears, but deep down inside, this felt

right. *Is this the destiny Feathernose was telling me about.* Flowerpelt took a deep breath. "Mallownose was an incredibly deputy and it will be hard to even compare to her," She spoke, raising her voice so that all of SunClan could hear. "But I vow to all of you that I will do my absolute best to serve my Clan."

"I know you will, Flowerpelt." Foxstar's eyes glowed. She met her leader's gaze and felt a wave of confidence and faith wash over her. *I can do this.* She told herself.

"Flowerpelt! Flowerpelt! Flowerpelt!" The Clan cheered her name and Flowerpelt could feel her Clanmate's supportive and loving gazes on her back. She turned her gaze to the nursery entrance where Stormwind was watching with fierce pride burning in her eyes. Flowerpelt quickly padded up to her sister.

"I'm so proud of you." Stormwind nuzzled Flowerpelt. "I always had a feeling you could be leader some day."

"Thank you." Flowerpelt replied, feeling even more reinvigorated by her sister's words. "This all feels right. This feels like my destiny." She glanced up towards the sky, was Feathernose watching? Was this the destiny he was talking about? *Is this who I'm really meant to be?*

Chapter 38

"Tigertail, I want you to lead a patrol along the AshClan border. Take Snowtail, Slateclaw, Sandfoot, Windflight and Barkfang." Flowerpelt instructed. Tigertail nodded and gathered up the cats she had listed off. "Icepetal, I want you to lead a hunting party out near the training area. Take, Applespots, Blazeheart, Cloudstorm and Frostclaw. When they return then Rustpelt can lead a hunting patrol on the other side of the territory, take Brightclaw, Sunstream, Thornpelt, Crowfur and Willownose." All the cats she had listed nodded and went out to prepare for their duties.

In the past moon, Flowerpelt had adjusted easily to being deputy. She planned out each patrol before she went to sleep so she could have them ready by the time she woke up. Flowerpelt woke up at dawn every morning to make sure no patrol was late. They were still in heavy leaf-bare so she had to make sure that SunClan had plenty of prey.

Briarheart and Flintstripe had come down with sickness but were under the care of Poppyfur. Flowerpelt prayed to StarClan that they wouldn't lose any more cats, not after all they had lost during the battle with LichenClan.

"Flowerpelt!" Flowerpelt turned her head to see Foxstar leaving his den. She trotted up to her leader. "I want to talk to you about the gathering tonight." Flowerpelt blinked, she had been wondering what would happen at it. Would Elmstar challenge the Clans again? Had he attacked the other Clans?

"Sure, what about?"

"I don't want to take as many warriors as we usually to the gathering tonight. I don't trust Elmstar." Foxstar explained. "I also don't want to start another fight, we will share the news of our dead and what happened but we will let the other Clans decide how to feel about Elmstar and his actions."

"Alright, Foxstar." Flowerpelt dipped her head. "I'll figure out which cats to take and I'll let them know." She turned away, but Foxstar stopped her.

"One last thing," His eyes were bold. "We have to let the other Clans know that we're still strong."

Flowerpelt eventually decided on the cats she would take, leaving several strong warriors like Tigertail and Rustpelt behind to guard the camp in case Elmstar tried to attack during the gathering. Flowerpelt didn't know if he would really go that far, but they couldn't risk it.

When they reached the hollow, Flowerpelt noticed that LichenClan hadn't arrived yet. The thought made her fur on end. She also felt nerves clawing at her, this was her first gathering as deputy and she wasn't sure what the other deputies would think of her. Flowerpelt walked beside both Foxstar and Poppyfur to where the leaders, deputies and medicine cats met.

She quickly recognized Cloudstar with her deputy Ivystone and her medicine cat, Badgerstripe. They were talking with Ivystar, Lionpelt and Moonwhisker. The first cat to notice them was Moonwhisker. "Hello, Foxstar." Her eyes went to Flowerpelt and Poppyfur. "Where's Mallownose and Honeywing?"

"In StarClan." Foxstar replied sadly.

"Both?" Cloudstar blinked, her eyes sympathetic. "I hope this doesn't have something to do with what happened at the last gathering."

"I wish I could say that it didn't." Foxstar mewed. "I'll explain more once the gathering actually starts. I can say that I'm not looking forward to see Elmstar again." Flowerpelt couldn't help but agree.

"Well, I'm sad to hear about your loss." Ivystar mewed. "But Flowerpelt seems like a very capable deputy and I'm sure Poppyfur is just as talented as Honeywing."

"Thank you, Ivystar." Flowerpelt dipped her head respectfully to the AshClan leader, they were all kind.

Cloudstar lifted her head and looked to the other side of the gathering hollow. "It looks like LichenClan is here." Flowerpelt tensed and she could feel Poppyfur and Foxstar do the same beside her. She looked towards where the Clan was entering, expecting to see Elmstar's smug expression, instead she saw the Clan being led by Jaggedtail with Mossleaf and Barkclaw by his side.

"Jaggedtail?" Foxstar stepped forward when Jaggedtail neared the other leaders. "Where is Elmstar?"

Jaggedtail took a deep breath. "I had to act, he was going to destroy m Clan so Elmstar was driven out and he died. I'm the leader of LichenClan now." Flowerpelt stared in shock, he had really driven Elmstar out of the forest and killed him?

"I'm sorry you had to do that." Foxstar dipped his head. "But I know that LichenClan is under good leadership now, you've always been a noble warrior."

"I agree." Cloudstar and Ivystar stepped forward as well. "I think that LichenClan has a bright future with you as their leader."

"Thank you, all." Jaggedstar's eyes were soft, he was genuinely happy. *I hope LichenClan will be okay now, I know the rest of us will be.* He lifted his head. "Let's get this gathering started, shall we?"

Flowerpelt sat with the other deputies, she looked at Mossleaf who looked incredibly shy and nervous. *It's her first gathering as a deputy too.* Flowerpelt sat beside the brown she-cat and gave her an encouraging gaze, Mossleaf's eyes were grateful.

"I suppose I should start." Jaggedstar spoke up. "After Elmstar attacked LichenClan we lost a lot of our own cats including Gingerdust, Daisyfern, Timberfall and Rabbitwing. Not long after we lost several more cats to greencough including Stormsong, Willowstrike, Poppywing, and Cedarcloud. The next day, Cherrypool died as well." Flowerpelt stared in shock at the new LichenClan, she didn't know that LichenClan had lost so many cats. Jaggedstar was clearly in pain as he named off all the loss his clan had experienced.

"I realized that Elmstar would destroy our Clan if he remained leader, so I drove him out of the Clan. I am now leader and my deputy is Mossleaf." He took a deep breath. "I want to apologize to SunClan for all the death we brought to you. Elmstar was twisted in the head, but he wasn't always like this. I hope that you don't look down upon LichenClan for his actions, but I also hope that one day you'll be able to forgive him for his mistakes." Flowerpelt blinked, she wasn't sure how she felt about that. "Elmstar was my best friend, like a brother to me and it hurt so much for what I had to do, but I had to do what was best for my Clan."

"Elmstar left his scar on this forest," Foxstar spoke up. "But I do not blame LichenClan. I don't see us forgiving Elmstar soon, but perhaps in the future. What I do know is that with you as leader, LichenClan has a bright future." The other two leaders nodded in agreement.

"Thank you, Foxstar." Jaggedstar dipped his head and sat down, done with his news. The next leader to stand up was Foxstar who looked over the Clans.

"During LichenClan's attack we lost several cats including Mallownose, Honeywing, Rockfall, Moonfur and Jayflight. It's saddening but SunClan has been recovering. "Our new deputy is Flowerpelt and Poppyfur is a more than an exceptional medicine cat to take over in Honeywing's place." The Clans cheered for both Flowerpelt and Poppyfur. "We've also had two new kits born to Lakeflight and Slateclaw, Rockkit and Stonekit. We are looking at these cats as hope for our future."

Flowerpelt agreed with what her leader was saying, Rockkit and Stonekit's birth had brought a lot of hope to SunClan. Those two as well as Dovekit were very healthy and strong kits, they would surely being hope to SunClan. Flowerpelt listened to the other Clans as they relayed their news, the night was cold but as it came to a close, Flowerpelt went home with pride for her Clan and a heart full of hope.

Chapter 39

There was cloud of sadness that hung of SunClan. Despite their best efforts, greencough still claimed two lives. Briarheart and Flintstripe had gotten too weak and couldn't fight the sickness, eventually joining StarClan. Tallfern and Fernsong were both distraught over the deaths of their mates and Flowerpelt feared that they would not be the last deaths. They were a moon into newleaf and two cats were stick, Marshpelt and Foxstar.

Both cats had heavy coughs that Poppyfur couldn't treat, even with catmint. Flowerpelt knew she feared the worse. The two remaind in Foxstar's den under the care of Poppyfur. Flowerpelt spent most of her days in fear that they would die, she knew that Foxstar was on his last life. Flowerpelt wasn't sure she was ready to be leader, she had only been deputy for three moons. Could she really take over the Clan so soon?

Flowerpelt tried to distract herself and the Clan by having constant hunting and patrols over the territory. She would go on as many of those patrols as she could to keep herself busy. She didn't want to think about being leader, she didn't want to say goodbye to Foxstar. During her time as deputy the two cats had become close and Flowerpelt considered Foxstar one of her close friends. He was wise, kind and a great cat to do things with. *Please, StarClan. I'm not ready to be leader yet.* She prayed yet again, something she did several times a day.

Flowerpelt shook the thoughts away and gathered up the patrol she had set up along the MoonClan border. The cats with here were Blazeheart, Rowanfall, Rustpelt, and Applespots. The snow was gone with and the forest regrowing itself as it always did. Prey would be returning and surely some new kits would be born.

This season would be perfect if it wasn't for the fact that Foxstar and Marshpelt were still suffering from sickness. *It should've been gone by now.* Flowerpelt couldn't help but wonder if it wasn't something other than greencough.

Flowerpelt led her patrol towards the river where she spotted movement on the other side. She narrowed her eyes and saw what looked like Crowsky and Baderstripe. Flowerpelt approached the river and called over to them. "Greetings." She dipped her head.

"Hello." Crowsky mewed in return.

"Where are going?" Flowerpelt questioned. "If you don't mind me asking."

"Cloudstar lost her last life." Badgerstripe replied sadly. "Crowsky is on his way to earn his nine lives."

"It's sad to hear that." Flowerpelt mewed. *Crowsky's been a deputy even shorter than I have, Ivystone died two moons ago.* "But I know you'll be a great leader, Crowsky." Flowerpelt honestly didn't know Crowsky that well, but from what she did know he seemed to be peaceful and kind.

"Thank you, Flowerpelt." He dipped his head. "But we should really get going, thank you for your kind words."

"May StarClan light your path." Rowanfall mewed.

"Yours as well." Badgerstripe said respectfully and the two cats vanished into MoonClan's territory.

"There's so many new leaders." Applespots mewed. "First Jaggedstar and now Crowsky is going to be leader." She didn't mention Foxstar but every cat knew that she was thinking it. *I'm going to be among them soon, aren't I?*

Flowerpelt marked the border and continued with their patrol. Her mind was racing with thoughts. At least she wouldn't be alone in being a new leader, she would hopefully be able to relate with the other new leaders even though both Jaggedstar and Crowsky were older than her. She also knew that Ivystar was nearing the end of her nine lives and soon Lionpelt would take her place. *I guess it's just that time.* Flowerpelt thought sadly.

I wonder what it's like getting nine lives. She wondered, she had been to the moonstone once before, but never got to actually see it.

Foxstar had chosen Thornpelt to go in with him and she had only a dream of seeing StarClan cats. The only StarClan cat she had seen was Feathernose when he came to talk her.

Flowerpelt soon found herself feeling guilty for thinking about becoming leader. *I can't think about that, I can't think about what's going to happen if my leader dies.* She tried to shove the thoughts away, but they stuck with her even more.

Flowerpelt and her patrol made their way home, and what Flowerpelt found made her heart stop. There were cats gathering around Marshpelt who was laying down outside of Foxstar's den. Foxstar watched from the entrance, his eyes wide with pain and horror. Flowerpelt quickly ran up to the group, Poppyfur was sitting beside Marshpelt. The mottled brown she-cat was still alive, but she looked weak. Her pelt clung to her frame and her eyes were dull.

"Marshpelt you need to get back inside." Poppyfur tried to move Marshpelt back into the SunTree, but she didn't budge.

"It's no use, Poppyfur." Her voice was scratchy and dry. "I can feel StarClan." She laughed, Flowerpelt's heart twisted. Beside her, Rustpelt and Barkfang watched their mother with pain in their eyes. *It's hard to see Marshpelt in such a state.* "Maybe now I can finally forgive myself." *Forgive herself?"*

"What do you have to forgive yourself for?" Foxstar stepped closer to his mate, his green eyes dark and pained.

"So long ago, I refused to get treated for my greencough and as a result, I got Rowanfall's kits sick. Two of them died...and it was all my fault." Marshpelt dropped her head, various gasps spread throughout the Clan.

Rowanfall stepped forward. "Marshpelt," Her voice was steady and gentle. "Nutkit's and Birchkit's deaths were not your fault. Neither me nor Alderfang blamed you for it."

"That didn't stop me from blaming myself." Marshpelt wept. "For so long I've been haunted by dreams of those two poor kits, dying because of me. I should've died, not them." She lifted her eyes and

Flowerpelt say something in her eyes that shocked her. It was happiness, pure happiness. "But now it's finally my turn. I can see Nutkit and Birchkit and apologize to them. I can finally be forgiven by the kits I killed."

"Why didn't you ever tell me about this, Marshpelt?" Foxstar laid down beside his mate, Marshpelt buried her muzzle in his ginger fur.

"Because, Foxstar, you had to focus on the Clan. You are an amazing leader, an amazing father and an amazing mate. I couldn't have had a better one." Her voice trembled. "I'll see you in StarClan." Marshpelt's voice was getting weaker, after a few moments she let out a long breath and fell limp against Foxstar's body.

Foxstar pressed his nose into Marshpelt's, pain visible on his face. The Clan was left in a stunned, depressed silence. None of them had any idea what Marshpelt had been going through. Flowerpelt stared at her paws, Foxstar and Marshpelt had such a powerful love between them, but Flowerpelt knew Foxstar blamed himself for not noticing what was wrong with her.

Flowerpelt took a deep breath, Foxstar was in no state to lead the Clan right now, she had to step up. "The death of Marshpelt is sad," Flowerpelt spoke up, getting the Clan's attention. "Let's give Foxstar and their kits the room to grieve and we can hold a vigil for her tonight."

She felt somewhat awkward taking charge, but the cats of SunClan did what she said. Rustpelt and Barkfang laid down beside their father and dead mother, huddling close one last time.

Flowerpelt turned away, feeling sadness gripping her heart. She looked up at the sky, Marshpelt was dead and Foxstar was still sick. How much more sadness would they have to deal with before SunClan found their peace?

Chapter 40

"Finally, Sunstream I want you to lead a hunting patrol out by the river. Take Tigertail, Icepetal, Cloudstorm and and Brightclaw with you." Sunstream nodded and quickly gathered her patrol to and left camp to go hunting. Once again, prey was plentiful and the forest was becoming lush and beautiful.

Life in the SunClan camp wasn't as beautiful. It had been a half-moon since Marshpelt died and Foxstar was still very sick and only getting worse. The entire Clan was preparing for the worst, even Flowerpelt. Despite her fears of not being ready to become leader, she had essentially been leading the Clan while he was sick. Foxstar couldn't even leave his nest anymore, she hadn't seen him in days. As much as it hurt her, Flowerpelt knew that it was only a matter of time before Foxstar joined StarClan.

When Flowerpelt was finished organizing patrols for the time being, she planned on visiting Stormwind and Dovekit. Dovekit was almost five moons old and would be an apprentice soon, Flowerpelt was excited to have her sister back on duties so they could go hunting and patrolling together like the old days.

However, as she was making her way to the nursery she was stopped Poppyfur. "Can I talk to you?" The medicine cat questioned, but Flowerpelt knew it wasn't really a question.

"Sure." Flowerpelt nodded and followed Poppyfur into the medicine cat den, it smelled strongly of herbs as usual. "What is it?"

"It's Foxstar." Flowerpelt's heart dropped, though she had an inkling that he was what Poppyfur wanted to talk about. "There's nothing more I can do for him. I don't think that he'll survive the night."

Flowerpelt dropped her head. "I had a feeling I just...I don't know if I'm ready to be leader."

"You are ready." Poppyfur said in her usual sharp tone. "Foxstar

wouldn't have picked you as deputy if he didn't think so." She sighed. "I know it's hard, trust me I do, but you have to stay strong." Flowerpelt blinked, remembering the words Feathernose had spoken to her after Falconclaw's attack. *But you have to stay strong, you have an incredibly strong destiny ahead of you. You have to stay strong, no matter what.*

Flowerpelt sighed, nudging a stray leaf with her paws. "I know I do. I've heard that plenty of times, but it's not easy."

"I know." Poppyfur mewed, sitting down and smoothing down her long fur. "I didn't know if I could ever be a medicine cat after what happened with Honeywing. Because of my mistake, because I broke not only the warrior code, but the medicine cat code as well, I got Honeywing killed." Flowerpelt looked a good look at Poppyfur's face. Since the death of Honeywing she had matured greatly, her eyes were haunted and her attitude even more ill and sharp. *I hope she knows that the rest of us don't blame her for Honeywing's death. Then again, I'm the only one who knows about Branchfur.*

She then thought back to Marshpelt's dying words. *That didn't stop me from blaming myself.* Even if Flowerpelt told Poppyfur that no cat blamed her, it wouldn't change her mind. Flowerpelt just hoped that one day, Poppyfur would be able to forgive herself. *She deserves, she's been through so much and she doesn't deserve the pain she's feeling from one mistake.*

Poppyfur sighed. "Regardless," She stood up. "We're not here to talk about me," Poppyfur met Flowerpelt's gaze. "Foxstar told me he wanted to talk to you before he died. We should probably do that now."

Flowerpelt blinked, she hadn't expected to talk to him but she nodded. "Okay, let's go." Flowerpelt followed Poppyfur out of the medicine cat den and to the SunTree. It was dim inside and smelled like sickness and herbs. Flowerpelt made out the shape of Foxstar in his nest. As she got closer she realized that he looked even worse than Marshpelt did. She could see his ribs and his face was gaunt. His ginger fur was matted and dull, his eyes devoid of any light.

He lifted his head when the two she-cats approached and for a

moment, there was a flash of hope and joy. "Thank you for coming, Flowerpelt." His voice was dry and scratchy. "Poppyfur, will you give us a moment?"

"Of course, Foxstar." Poppyfur turned around began leaving.

"Thank you for everything you've done for me and this Clan, Poppyfur." The medicine cat stopped and looked over her shoulder, pride and love making her eyes glow.

"It's been my honor, Foxstar." With that, Poppyfur left the den, leaving SunClan's leader and deputy alone. Flowerpelt suddenly realized what was going on. Foxstar wasn't going to talk to her because he was dying soon, he was talking to her because he was dying now.

"What did you need, Foxstar?" Flowerpelt asked, looking over her leader.

"I want to thank you for leading the Clan so well while I've been sick. As well as being a great deputy, even though it's been for a short time." He let out a series of heavy coughs before continuing. "Mallownose was my deputy since the day I became leader, she was always by my side and it was sad to see her die. When she died I knew that I wasn't just picking a new deputy, I was picking the new leader of SunClan. I could feel sickness that day and that's why I picked you." His green gaze bore into hers. "Because I knew that you would make an incredible leader."

Flowerpelt looked at her paws. "I've been worried that I'm not ready to become leader. It's something I've thought about, wanting to be leader one day but now that's soon to be a reality, I don't know how to feel about it."

"I wasn't a perfect leader," Foxstar continued. "Many cats died under my rule, and I couldn't see what was happening to my own mate. But there's two things I did during my leadership that I will never regret. I started an amazing family and I brought a kittypet into the Clan." Flowerpelt's eyes widened a bit at the mention of Dovewish. "When your father brought your mother to me for the first time I knew right away that she would be an amazing warrior. I never saw

your mother as a kittypet and I never will, I've done the same for your and your sister. You've never been kittypets, you've only ever been amazing, loyal warriors."

"Foxstar I--"

"Don't say it, Flowerpelt." Foxstar mewed, his voice getting shakier. "The only thing you need to do is your best. Do your best to lead SunClan, do your best to be the best cat you can be. That's all you can do." Foxstar rested his head and closed his eyes. "You're an amazing deputy and you'll be an even better leader.

Flowerpelt's heart tightened, his breathing was getting slowly. Flowerpelt touched her nose to his forehead, he was burning up. "Thank you, Foxstar. Thank you for being an incredible leader and guiding me. It's been an honor being your deputy."

Foxstar let out a purr, but didn't respond. Flowerpelt stayed by his side, listening to his breathing get slower and slower until it stopped completely. Flowerpelt swore she could feel a presence beside, but it soon faded away.

Flowerpelt stood up and looked at Foxstar's body, it was completely still and the den was now silent. *He's really dead.* She let out a sad sigh. *I have to tell the Clan.* She stepped outside, wincing slightly at the bright light after adjusting to his dim den. Flowerpelt looked up at the SunTree, it seemed so big from where she stood. *My first time climbing it.*

With a heave, Flowerpelt made her way to the top of the tree. She took a deep breath, cats were already starting to look at her. "Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath the SunTree for a Clan meeting." Speaking those words felt right and it wouldn't be the last time she ever spoke them, only the first of many. "I bet you all can assume why I'm up here. Foxstar is dead."

There was a moment of silence, Rustpelt and Barkfang dropped their heads, sitting close together as they mourned for the second time in such a short span. "Soon, I will go to the moonstone to receive my nine lives but I hope you all know how proud Foxstar was of his Clan. We will remember him forever."

"You'll be a great leader, Flowerpelt!" Icepetal called from the crowd.

"Of course she will." Brightclaw purred. "We've all known it.

"Foxstar's death is sad," Hawktalon spoke up from the elder's den. "But SunClan has a very bright future with Flowerpelt as our leader now."

"Flowerpelt! Flowerpelt! Flowerpelt!" Flowerpelt felt a strong, overwhelming surge of love and respect for her Clan. *They accept me as their leader, now I have to do the same.* Flowerpelt jumped down from her place on the SunTree. Before she left she wanted to talk to Stormwind.

Stormwind was sitting outside with Dovekit playing at her paws. "I'm going to miss Foxstar." She mewed sadly as Flowerpelt approached. "But SunClan couldn't wish for a better leader."

"Thank you." Flowerpelt dipped her head. "I was unsure of if I would be able to do this." She mewed, looking up at the sky. "But I can feel it in my heart that this is what I'm meant to do. This is my destiny."

Chapter 41

"Are you ready to go?" Poppyfur questioned. Flowerpelt gave a nod, her nerves about being a leader had quickly returned. Now she had to face whatever was going to happen to her at the moonstone. She had no idea how the ceremony would go and she knew that Poppyfur didn't either. The last medicine cat to help a leader though this ceremony was Feathernose when he helped Foxstar.

"We wanna get there before moonhigh so we should leave now." Poppyfur urged her impatiently. Flowerpelt agreed and followed the medicine cat out the camp. Before she left she took a glance over her shoulder. When she returned to camp she wouldn't be the same, she would have nine lives. Everything would be different, what would change about her?

Poppyfur and Flowerpelt quickly made their way through SunClan territory, Poppyfur was intent on not wasting any time but Flowerpelt had a lot of questions. "So, what is the moonstone like? I've only been the Spirit Woods once but I didn't get to go in."

"It's hard to explain. It's a giant stone that looks like it's filled with starlight. When you touch your nose to it your fall asleep and then you share dreams with StarClan. As for being a leader I don't really know. I know only what Feathernose told Honeywing. The leader speaks to StarClan, there's a ceremony and you get your nine lives."

Flowerpelt was still a little unsure. Was that all there was to it? Just touch her nose to a stone and get nine lives? Surely there had to be more to it than that. She supposed she would just have to wait and see.

They crossed into MoonClan territory and made it through without having to speak with any other cats. *They'll learn at the next gathering that I'm leader.* Flowerpelt tensed at that though. She was in charge of sharing the news at gatherings now. *I have so many new responsibilities.*

They finally reached the Spirit Woods, it was nearly moon high and the white trees glowed as she remembered them. Flowerpelt felt presences all around her, surrounding her and making her feel both unsettled and welcome at the same time. *Is this where StarClan spends their time?* She looked around, trying to catch glimpses of her starry-eyed ancestors.

When they reached the Spirit Tree, Poppyfur stopped her. "Okay, just do what I said. Go in and touch your nose to the moonstone. You'll fall asleep and wake up talking to StarClan cats. It's going to be scary down there, it's very dark and the tunnel down there is very narrow. Just stay calm and follow me."

Flowerpelt nodded and watched as Poppyfur stepped into the darkness of the cave. Flowerpelt took a deep, trembling breath and followed the medicine cat inside. She was instantly enveloped by darkness and her vision was reduced to nothing. She could hear Poppyfur's steps ahead of her, but the darkness was suffocating. She felt panic creeping in on her, but she did her best to remain calm despite the fact that she wanted to turn and run around. *Stay strong.* She told herself.

After what seemed like an eternity, Flowerpelt finally saw light. She could see the outline of Poppyfur and eventually the tunnel opened into a large cave. Her jaw dropped when she saw the moonstone. It was unlike anything she had ever seen before. It was just as Poppyfur had described it, a large stone that looked like it had stars trapped inside of it. It shimmered with the same beauty as Silverpelt, only much, much closer. Flowerpelt inched closer to it, she felt drawn to it almost.

"We're here right on time." Poppyfur mewed, her voice giving and eerie echo in this gave. "Go ahead. Everything will be okay." Flowerpelt swallowed her fears and stepped forward, she laid town, tucking her paws under her chest and faced the moonstone. It was even more beautiful up close. Taking another deep breath, Flowerpelt touched her nose to the surface of the stone and was plunged into blackness.

Flowerpelt couldn't move, she couldn't open her eyes. As she struggled to move she felt the warmth leaving her body. *What's*

happening to me? Flowerpelt questioned herself. *This feels...familiar.* Flowerpelt recalled when Falconclaw had attacked her and she realized what was happening. *They're stripping away my old life to give me my nine lives. I'm dying right now.*

The feeling slowly faded away and Flowerpelt felt her body filling with warmth once again and she was able to open her eyes. She sat up, taking in her surroundings. She was in the gathering hollow, but she was alone. *What happens now?* She blinked, feeling confused. Then she noticed movement above her.

The stars are moving. Flowerpelt realized with a shock and watched as the stars descended from the skies and began taking shape on the ground in front of her. They were taking the shapes of cats, Flowerpelt's heart ached when she recognized the cats before her. She saw her parents, Honeywing, Feathernose and so many other cats that she had lost. She could barely stop herself from running over to them and rejoicing with all her loved ones.

"Welcome, Flowerpelt." The cats of StarClan spoke, it sounded as if she could hear all the cats of StarClan speaking to her. "Are you ready to receive your nine lives?"

"I am." Flowerpelt was surprised at how steady her voice. *I really am ready for this.* The first cat to approach Flowerpelt was Dovewish. Emotions welled up inside her, she remembered how her mother looked when she died, that cat was no more. Dovewish's beautiful silver fur shimmering with stars and she held her head high. "Dovewish." Her voice cracked. "I-I'm so glad to see you. I've missed you so much." Her voice trembled with love and happiness, she could barely stand it.

"I've missed you too." Dovewish purred. "I'm so, so proud of you." Her eyes filled with the same emotions that Flowerpelt felt in her heart. "With this life I give you love. Use it to love every cat in your Clan as if they were your own kit." Dovewish leaned forward and touched her nose to Flowerpelt's.

When their noses touched, pain ripped through her body. It felt like fire and lightning were tearing through her body. She felt a powerful feeling of love, so powerful that it hurt. *What is happening?*

When Dovewish pulled away she left Flowerpelt trembling. "That hurt so much." Her voice shook, did she have to deal with that nine times?

"Not all lives will feel the same." Dovewish purred. "Stay strong." She whispered before walking back to the StarClan cats. The next cat to approach her gave Flowerpelt the same feelings of joy and love. It was Stonewhisker, looking as strong and brave as she remembered.

Flowerpelt opened her mouth to speak but Stonewhisker hushed her. "No need for words right now. I know what you're thinking and I'm so proud of both you and your sister." He stepped closer, amber eyes shimmering with stars. "With this life I give you bravery, use it to fight and defend your Clan during every battle, whether it be with other cats or sickness." Stonewhisker touched his nose to Flowerpelt's and she felt a similar pain, but it was also different. She felt the crippling fear of a battle or watching a Clanmate die, but it was soon replaced with a feeling of intense bravery.

She opened her eyes and watched Stonewhisker return the ranks of StarClan. The next cat to approach Flowerpelt was Honeywing. Her beautiful golden coat sparkled with stars and her eyes were filled with so much love and wisdom. "I always knew I would see you here, Flowerpelt." The former medicine cat purred. "You've earned it." Flowerpelt looked at her gratefully. "With this life I give you compassion, use it to care for each and every cat you meet." Honeywing touched her nose to Flowerpelt's, she expected it to hurt like others but instead she was filled with a warm sensation. The feeling of being kind and loving cats. Honeywing turned away and Flowerpelt braced herself for the next life.

The next cat was Feathernose, he looked like he did was he was in his prime. Long, flowing gray fur and beautiful green eyes. "I told you that you had a very powerful destiny. I couldn't be prouder of you."

"Thank you for all your guidance." Flowerpelt mewed, finally glad she could say those words to his face.

Feathernose dipped his head. "With this life I give you the ability to

be calm under pressure, so that even when you feel like your world is ending around you, you can stay calm and serve your Clan." Flowerpelt blinked, so many times she had seen Feathernose doing just that. It was a skill she was proud to soon have. Feathernose touched his nose to Flowerpelt's and she felt the panicked feeling she had felt so many times before, watching her Clanmates die from sickness or battle. Like the others, it ebbed away and left her feeling stronger.

Flowerpelt's heart skipped when she saw that the next cat was Owlfoot, her beloved mentor. "Owlfoot," Her voice cracked. "I'm so sorry that you had to die to Falconclaw I--"

"Enough, Flowerpelt." He hushed her. "I trained you to be a warrior and it is my honor to give you more guidance as you grow as a leader. With this life I give you patience, use it to take your time and make decisions, also to wait and allow things to come to you." Owlfoot touched his nose to hers and Flowerpelt felt the itching sensation of impatience, wanting to get on her paws and take action. When that feeling faded, Owlfoot retreated and Fishtail took his place.

The she-cat looked like what Flowerpelt imagined her to look like her days as a young, healthy warrior. "Greetings, young one." Fishtail dipped her head. "With this life I give you stubbornness, it may seem like a bad thing, but use it to not be swayed easily. Stand your ground and what you believe in." Fishtail and Flowerpelt touched noses and Flowerpelt felt the sensation of stubbornness, not wanting to move or make a decision that was different than what she thought.

Fishtail turned away and Flowerpelt felt joy in her heart when she saw Berrypaw bounding up. The apprentice's eyes were wide and as full as energy as ever. *You'll be able to run all you want in StarClan.* She thought happily. "Hi, Flowerpelt." She said cheerfully. "With this life, I give you energy. Use it to run and fight for your Clan as much as you can, also use it to have fun and enjoy your life." Flowerpelt had to lower her head so that Berrypaw could touch noses with her. This life was pleasant, she felt the exhilaration of running through the forest as fast as she could.

"Thank you, Berrypaw." Flowerpelt purred and Berrypaw bounded away, sitting beside Feathernose.

The next cat was Mallownose. As usual, Mallownose walked with purpose and held her head high. "I'm proud of you, Flowerpelt. There's no other cat I would've chosen to be deputy in my place than you."

"That means a lot." Flowerpelt thanked Mallownose. The gray she-cat gave a proud nod.

"With this life I give you intelligence. Use it to make wise choices and lead your Clan with wisdom and confidence." Mallownose and Flowerpelt touched noses and she felt an odd sensation of thinking and feeling intelligent.

Flowerpelt had received eight lives, and there was one more life left she needed. Flowerpelt watched as Foxstar left the ranks of StarClan, no longer was he in the weak state that she last saw him as but he had fiery ginger pelt and bright, shimmering green eyes. He was bold and strong. "Flowerpelt," He dipped his head. "I already told you what I needed to say. It's time for your final life." Flowerpelt braced herself. "With this life I give you loyalty, use it to be loyal to your family and you Clanmates, so they can always trust in you." Foxstar touched his nose to Flowerpelt and she felt the strong feeling of loyalty that she already had for her Clanmates, but it was amplified to an almost painful point.

Finally the pain ebbed away and Foxstar stepped back to the rest of the cats. Foxstar began speaking once more. "I hail you by your new name, Flowerstar. Your old life is no more. You have now received the nine lives of a leader, and StarClan grants you the guardianship of SunClan. Defend it well; care for young and old; honor your ancestors and the traditions of the warrior code; live each life with pride and dignity."

"Flowerstar! Flowerstar! Flowerstar!" A strange surge of emotions enveloped Flowerstar, her new name felt right, it felt like who she really was. She felt the strength of all her loved ones surrounding her as they cheered her brand new name.

Flowerstar blinked and suddenly all the cats around her were gone, with the exception of Feathernose. He looked at her with a gentle gaze, he sat with his fluffy tail resting over his paws. "You made it, Flowerstar. How does it feel?"

"It feels incredible." Flowerstar approached the old medicine cat. "What happens now?"

"After this you'll go home, chose a deputy and lead your Clan. For now, I have something to tell you."

Flowerstar tilted her head. "What is it?"

"When the forest is in danger, a new dawn will blaze brighter than the sun." His voice had a slight echo to it, sending chills down Flowerstar's spine.

"What is that? What does it mean?" Flowerstar questioned, not understanding what Feathernose was trying to tell her.

"It's a prophecy and I'm not sure. Usually you won't learn about prophecies until they've come into light. Don't let it worry you too much." Feathernose stood up and stood beside Flowerstar. "For now, do what I said earlier: Go home, chose a deputy and lead your Clan. Everything will fall into place."

Chapter 42

Flowerstar walked into camp feeling like an entirely new cat. She now had nine lives, she had spoken with StarClan and received a prophecy. *When the forest is in danger, a new dawn will blaze brighter than the sun.* What did it mean? Feathernose told her not to worry about it so she wasn't going to. She had something much more present to worry about, choosing a deputy.

She had no idea who to pick, she had a few ideas but she didn't have any other clue. When Flowerstar entered camp, the first cat to notice her was Stormwind. She was watching over Dovekit, Rockkit and Stonekit. She turned her head and her eyes went wide. "Flowerpelt!" She sprinted over to Flowerstar and nuzzled her all over. She stepped back, looking slightly awkward. "Err...I guess it's Flowerstar now right?"

Flowerstar nodded. "I got my nine lives." She wished that she could tell Stormwind about Dovewish and Stonewhisker but Poppyfur told her that she was strictly not allowed to share what happened during the ceremony.

"That's wonderful." Stormwind purred. "Do you have a deputy in mind yet?" Flowerstar shook her head, but she figured that she should call a meeting to let the Clan know her ceremony was successful.

She quickly trotted over to the SunTree and climbed up so she was on top, looking over her Clan. "Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath the SunTree for a Clan meeting!"

Flowerstar watched as her Clan quickly gathered under the SunTree. *They really are my Clan now.* "I just wanted to let you all know that the ceremony was successful and I have my nine lives. It will be hard to serve in the place of Foxstar but I promise I will do my best to serve you the best I possibly can."

Her Clanmates cheered their new leader and Flowerstar dismissed

them. Once she jumped down she found herself face to face with Thornpelt. His amber eyes were serious, they hadn't really spoken during the past few moons. Despite the awkwardness, Flowerstar held her head higher, after all she was his leader now. "Can I help you, Thornpelt?"

He narrowed his eyes slightly. "We need to talk." Flowerstar felt somewhat awkward but nodded. "Let's go to your den."

Right. It's my den now. Flowerstar realized, she wasn't looking forward to sleeping alone. *I guess I'll get used to it.* She poked her head inside and realized that the old moss had been completely swapped out for clean moss.

"Icepetal and Snowtail cleaned out your den." Thornpelt explained. *It still kind of smells like Foxstar in here.* Flowerstar thought, then faced Thornpelt.

"What did you need?"

"You need to pick a deputy and I thought I'd remind you of the promise we made when your father died." His voice was curt, Flowerstar narrowed her eyes slightly. They *had* made a promise that if either of them became leader, the other would be made deputy but so much had changed between them...and there was one other thing.

"Thornpelt..." She shuffled her paws. "We did make that promise but you haven't mentored an apprentice...I can't make you my deputy."

Anger flashed in his amber eyes. "But you promised!" He spat, Flowerstar took a step back. *No. I can't be scared of him. I have to show I'm strong, I'm a leader now.*

"I'm sorry Thornpelt but there's nothing I can do. Even if we did still have what we used to I couldn't make you my deputy. I refuse to break the warrior code." She kept her voice stern, not matter how much it hurt her.

Thornpelt lashed his tail. "Some friend you are!" He shouted.

"You stopped being my friend the moment you didn't tell the Clan

about Falconclaw!" She shouted in response. "I still haven't forgotten about that!"

Thornpelt took a step closer, his muzzle inches from her. "Who do you think killed Falconclaw?" He growled, Flowerstar couldn't help but step backwards from him. "It wasn't some random rouge it was me!"

Flowerstar stared in shock, she had always guessed it was him, but now she knew for sure. *Still. My decision still stands.* She took a deep breath. "It doesn't matter if we're friends or not, Thornpelt. I can't make you deputy and there's nothing you do to convince me to break the warrior code."

Thornpelt hissed and turned around, storming out of the SunTree, leaving Flowerstar standing awkward and alone in her den. She dropped her head and let out a long sigh. "What was his problem?" Flowerstar's ears twitched and she looked up to see Stormwind standing in the entrance of her den. "He stormed out in a hurry."

"It's a long story." Flowerstar sat down, suddenly feeling exhausted.

"I've got time." Stormwind trotted inside and sat down beside her sister. "Lakeflight took the kits to the elder's den for some stories, I needed a break. Flowerstar looked at Stormwind. *It would be nice to talk about it.* Flowerstar thought.

"Back when Thornpelt and I were really close, we made a promise, just after Stonewhisker died, that if one of us became leader we would make the other one deputy. Not only are we not close anymore but he hasn't trained an apprentice."

"I see." Stormwind mewed, thinking for a moment. "Well that's really not your fault." She said. "You can't break the warrior code for him. Plus, I don't really know if he'd make a good deputy if that's the way he reacted." Flowerstar couldn't help but agree. Then, a face flashed in her mind. The perfect choice for a deputy, a cat that she thought would've been of picked instead of her.

"I think who I know I want to be deputy." Flowerstar looked down at her paws. "But it's going to make Thornpelt hate me even more."

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath the SunTree for a Clan meeting!" Flowerstar called her Clan to gather. It was just before sunset and the dusk sky was a beautiful shade of orange. She waited patiently for the cats of SunClan to finish gathering before she started speaking. "I've decided on a deputy. This cat has shown to be strong, brave, wise and mature more times than I can count." The cats looked around, questioning who it would be. "I say these words before the spirit of StarClan, so they may hear and approve my choice. Tigertail will be the new deputy of SunClan!"

There was a mixture of reactions from the cats of SunClan, pretty much all were positive. Tigertail was a well respected warrior and Flowerstar knew that they would support him as deputy. Then Flowerstar met Thornpelt's gaze, his amber eyes were wide and full of betrayal. *I'm sorry, Thornpelt. I really am, but I have to do what's best for the Clan.*

Sunstream urged Tigertail to go up and speak, her green eyes full of love and pride for her mate. "Go on!" She shoved him forward and Tigertail finally moved, looking up at Flowerstar.

"I wasn't expecting this, Flowerstar." He mewed. "But I promise that I will do everything in my power to be a deputy that SunClan is proud of, and I can't think of a better leader of Clan to serve."

Flowerstar looked down proudly at her new deputy, she had chosen wisely. *I'm a leader, it's time to put emotions and old friendships aside. Tigertail is what's best for SunClan, I can feel it.*

"Tigertail! Tigertail! Tigertail!" The Clan cheered their new deputy with pride, his family, even Thornpelt, swarmed around him. They celebrated his new role and he looked just as happy. Flowerstar jumped down and looked over her Clan. So much had changed, she had grown so much and learned so much.

She started out as an apprentice who was behind on her training and was now leader of her Clan. She sighed happily and stared up at the slowly falling sun. This was her life now, her destiny. She could only imagine what the future would hold for her.

Epilogue

Flowerstar looked outside her den watching Blazeheart quickly run from the nursery to Poppyfur's den. "Windflight must be having her kits." Flowerstar said to Stormwind who was washing her chest inside the den.

"Hopefully it's not just another false alarm." Stormwind mewed. "She's had a lot of those."

"I don't know, Blazeheart seems pretty excited about it. This could be the real thing, it's about time." Flowerstar returned to her den and sat down beside her sister. It had been many, many moons since Flowerstar became leader and a lot of things had happened. Over time, SunClan lost many warriors including Brightclaw, Fernsong, Rowanfall, Frostclaw, Slateclaw, Lakeflight and Rockfur's brother, Stonepaw when he was an apprentice. They all died to various causes, mostly sickness but Fernsong, Brightclaw and Stonepaw died to a fox attack a few moons back.

Despite all the deaths, SunClan had plenty of new members as well. Sandfoot and Rustpelt had two kits, Redpaw and Squirrelpaw. Bramblepelt and Willownose had a single daughter named Fawnpaw and Snakewhisker and Stormwind had a second kit named Adderpaw. Stormwind's own kit, Dovetail had given birth to Rockfur's two kits, Breezekit and Owlkit but they didn't survive long after being born. All the cats in Dovetail's family had been torn apart by it, but now Dovetail was back in the nursery expecting another litter which they all had high hopes for.

Sunstream finally had Tigertail's kits, two golden kits named Lionkit and Goldenkit and finally, Windflight moved into the nursery with Blazeheart's kits and was due any day now. After a while passed, Flowerstar heard the familiar cries of a queen giving birth and sat outside to keep an eye on the situation, Stormwind joined her.

After a long while, the crying stopped and Poppyfur stepped inside and Sunstream took her kits back in the nursery. It was nighttime,

Flowerstar looked up at the sky and noticed it was the half-moon. *Poppyfur is going to be late for her meeting.* Flowerstar thought and looked down, seeing that Poppyfur was hurrying towards the SunTree.

"How are the kits?" Flowerstar asked her friend.

"Perfectly strong and healthy," Poppyfur replied, her voice filled with joy. Flowerstar knew how much Poppyfur loved helping deliver kits. "There's three, two she-cats and a tom."

"Wonderful." Stormwind purred, Flowerstar couldn't help but notice a distant look in her sister's eyes. *She's thinking of Owlkit and Breezekit.* "With Lionkit and Goldenkit at four moons old, we'll have a full apprentice den here soon."

"That's a good sign." Flowerstar pointed out. "Apprentices mean warriors."

"I'd love to stay and talk," Poppyfur mewed, looking up at the night sky. "But I need to hurry to the moonstone." Flowerstar dipped her head.

"I understand, I'll see you when you get back." Flowerstar watched as Poppyfur nearly ran out of camp. She let out a small chuckle.

"Well," Stormwind stood up and stretched out. "I'm gonna go get some sleep. I'll see you tomorrow, Flowerstar."

"Goodnight, Stormwind." Flowerstar purred and say goodbye to her sister, turning into her own den. She had grown used to sleeping alone in her den, some nights she wished the company of her warriors, but most times she enjoyed the solitude and space. After a short time getting settled, Flowerstar fell into a gentle sleep.

The next morning, Flowerstar found that Poppyfur was visiting her quite early. Something seemed to be bothering her. "What's wrong?" Flowerstar asked the medicine cat stepped into her den.

"Last night," Poppyfur kept looking at the nursery. *Is something wrong with the kits?* Flowerstar wondered with concern. "At the moonstone, Honeywing visited me and she told me of a prophecy.

'When the forest is in danger, a new dawn will blaze brighter than the sun.'"

Flowerstar's stiffened, suddenly remembering the prophecy she had received when she became leader, it was so long ago that she nearly forgot about it. "I've heard that prophecy." Flowerstar mewed, at Poppyfur's confused expression she explained. "When I became leader, after I got my nine lives, Feathernose told me that exact prophecy. Do you know what it means?"

"I didn't at first," Poppyfur admitted. "But I talked to Windflight and she named her kits Turtlekit, Willowkit and *Dawn*kit. She said she heard Dawnkit's name in a dream."

Flowerstar blinked. "Do you think the prophecy is about Dawnkit?"

"I don't know." Poppyfur shook her head, sounding frustrated. "We can only guess for now. I'm going to keep a close on her, she could a greater density than anything we've ever seen before."

"Have you decided on their mentors yet?" Stormwind asked, taking a bite of the squirrel that she and Flowerstar were sharing just outside her den. "They'll be apprenticed here soon."

Flowerstar nodded, swallowing the piece of prey she was eating. "I know and I think I have. I've given it a lot of thought and I think I want Rainears to mentor Turtlekit. He's got a lot of potential, but he's very passive. He mostly just listens to what Willowkit tells him to do. You saw them yesterday." Stormwind nodded in agreement. "Rainears is a very kind and encouraging cat, I think she'll be able to help find his voice." Flowerstar took another bite. "As for Dawnkit, she's smart but she's incredibly skittish. I think Sunstream will be a great mentor for her. She's kind, patient and I really think she'll be able to bring out the best in Dawnkit."

"And for Willowkit? She's going to be a pawful for any cat she's an apprentice to. I haven't seen that kind of arrogance since Blazeheart was an apprentice. I guess we know where she gets it from." Stormwind chuckled.

"I think I want Thornpelt will be the best choice for her." Flowerpelt

admitted.

"Really? You're finally giving him an apprentice?" Stormwind laughed. "You know he's been dying for one, all of his siblings have had apprentices."

Flowerstar shuffled her paws awkwardly. "I know but, he hasn't been the right fit for any of the other apprentices, but I think his stern and strict attitude will do well for Willowkit. I'm also hoping she'll lighten him up a little." She dropped her head. "Is it really that bad that I haven't given him an apprentice yet?"

Stormwind shrugged. "Not really, you're the leader and it's your decision. He's getting his turn and he can relax about it." She flicked her ears.

"It's so weird to think about." Flowerstar mewed, feeling somewhat nostalgic.

"What is?" Stormwind inquired curiously.

"There was a time in my life where I wanted to be mates with Thornpelt, even have kits with him. I think I genuinely loved him." She sighed, she didn't feel sad about anymore but sometimes she wondered what could've happened. "I don't regret my life at all, I love leading SunClan more than anything, but I just wonder what could've been ya'know?"

Stormwind nodded. "I do know." She brushed her tail across Flowerstar's side. "But don't think too much into it. You're starting to sound like an elder." Her blue eyes were teasing. Flowerstar took a playful swipe at her sister's ears but the she-cat quickly ducked, laughing.

Movement caught Flowerstar's eyes, she looked across camp to see Poppyfur sprinting from the warriors den to the medicine cat with Willowkit in her jaws, Dawnkit ran behind in tow while Turtlekit went into the nursery, her fur stood on end.

"What's happening?" Stormwind questioned, suddenly serious. Both sisters stood up and quickly hurried to the medicine cat. Flowerstar

watched Windflight explode out of the nursery, Blazeheart was already on his way.

"Poppyfur!" Windflight cried into the medicine cat den, Flowerstar heard a hiss from Poppyfur. "Oh, my precious kit!"

"Get back!" Poppyfur spat at Windflight, the distressed queen lashed her tail.

"That's my kit!"

"She's my patient right now so do what I say!" She looked past Windflight. "Blazeheart, keep her and Turtlekit back. I need Dawnkit with me." Blazeheart helped Windflight away from the nursery, the queen was catatonic.

"What happened?"

"Willowkit ate deathberries." The frightened squeak came from Turtlekit who was pressing up against his parents. *Deathberries?* Flowerstar's blood turned cold. *In my camp?*

"Where are they?" Flowerstar questioned Turtlekit, he motioned with his paw towards the warriors den. Flowerstar had a feeling she knew where they were. She left the family to worry and went to the area behind the warrior's den, where there was a slope going upward, the slope that Flowerstar fell of a kit and broke her ankle. Sure enough, there was a yew bush growing with bright red berries, with one missing.

Stormwind had followed her and let out a gasp as she saw the bush. "I need to get this out of here." Using her claws, Flowerstar ripped the plant out of the ground. She carefully grabbed the stem of the bush, making sure not to pierce it with her teeth. "I'll be right back." Flowerstar muttered through a mouthful of yew and turned to leave camp.

She made sure she was far enough away from camp and and buried the bush, marking it with a stone dug into the ground so she would know always where it was. *I can't believe I allowed this to happen. Poison in my own camp, I should've known they were there!* Flowerstar

scolded herself.

Flowerstar returned to camp just to see Blazeheart carrying Dawnkit from the medicine cat to the nursery, but not Willowkit. Windflight leaned against her mate, wailing about her dead kit. Flowerstar dropped her head. *How could this happen? It could've been easily avoided.* Flowerstar lashed her tail. *I'm a mouse-brain.*

Flowerstar quickly padded to the medicine cat den to check on Poppyfur, the medicine cat was sitting in the center of her den, her head dropped and her shoulder's slumped. "Poppyfur?" Flowerstar kept her voice quiet, she could see Willowkit's body in a nest, she looked like she was sleeping but her body was still.

"I made a mistake..." Poppyfur's voice trembled and was full of pain. "I made a mistake, Flowerstar." She looked over her shoulder, eyes were filled with so much hatred, hatred directed at herself. "I just made Dawnkit watch the death of her own sister...she's too young for that..." Poppyfur's body shook violently, she fell to the ground. Flowerstar ran over to her medicine cat and friend. "What have I done?"

Flowerstar laid down and pressed into Poppyfur, trying to soothe her. "Dawnkit is supposed to be the subject of this prophecy and I just subjected her to the most horrible thing imaginable." Poppyfur wept, her body shaking with sobs.

"Dawnkit will be okay." Flowerstar said quietly. "We'll guide her and we'll make sure she lives her life to the fullest." Poppyfur didn't respond, she just buried her nose in Flowerstar's chest. *Dawnkit is the subject of our prophecy...* Flowerstar thought. *What destiny does Dawnkit hold and what will it bring for SunClan?*